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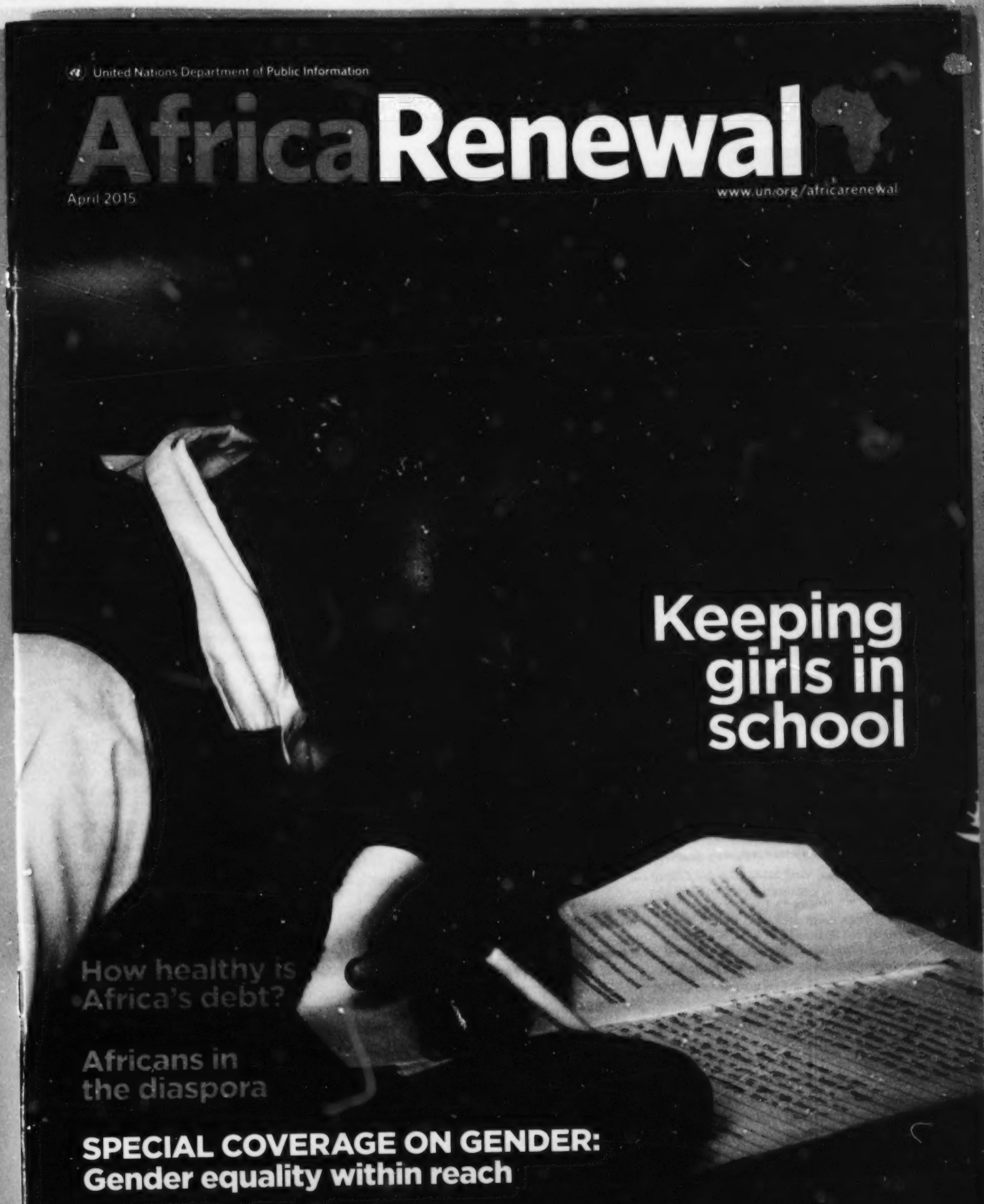

Keeping girls in school

How healthy is Africa's debt?

Africans in the diaspora

SPECIAL COVERAGE ON GENDER:
Gender equality within reach

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Women at the launch of the Anti-Rape Campaign in Monrovia. *UNMIL/Emmanuel Tobey*

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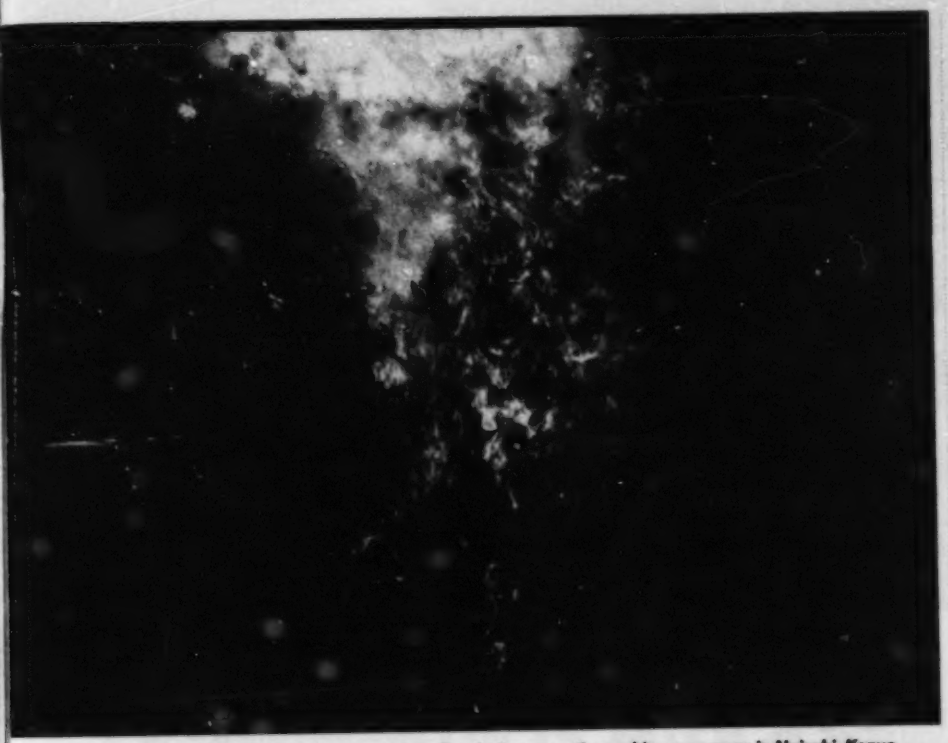


Fifteen tons of elephant tusks were set on fire during an anti-poaching ceremony in Nairobi, Kenya, early this year. AP Photo/Khalil Senosi

Wildlife crime at record high

By Pavithra Rao

The situation is dire: slaughtering wild animals for their horns and tusks is mushrooming and the statistics are so worrisome that experts are calling for a crackdown on wildlife crime.

This was the focus of this year's Wangari Maathai Day, commemorated on 3 March and named after the late Kenyan Nobel Prize Laureate and founder of the Green Belt Movement, who was known for her passion and struggle to preserve nature.

The event began with a grand gesture: Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta presided over the burning of 15 tons of elephant tusks seized from poachers to highlight the need to end the $200 billion illicit trade taking place in Africa, especially the killing of elephants for their tusks, rhinos for their horns and the illegal trafficking of great apes. Banners proclaiming, "Wildlife crime is serious; let's get serious about wildlife crime" were prominently on display.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora says poaching is steadily threatening the population of elephants and rhinos in Africa. In South Africa, for example, rhino poaching has risen drastically from 10 cases in 2006 to 1,215 in 2014. Back in 2011, black rhinos were already declared extinct as a result of poaching.

However, it's not just the elephants and rhinos that are under threat. Great apes, including chimpanzees, orangutans, gorillas and bonobos are also being illegally trafficked. The UN Environment Programme Great Apes Survival Partnership (UNEP-GRASP) says that great apes are sold for meat and leftover body parts, such as limbs, heads and even bones, are then traded for use in medicine.

In addition, these animals are being sold to satisfy a growing demand for exotic pets or for use in circuses and zoos. Elephants, rhinos and great apes play an important role in maintaining healthy ecosystems and their absence could have serious repercussions on the biodiversity of key regions.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted the gravity of the situation during a speech for International Wildlife Day: "Combating this crime is not only essential for conservation efforts and sustainable development; it will contribute to achieving peace and security in troubled regions where conflicts are fuelled by these illegal activities."

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner is calling for action and the scale-up of intervention that includes financing.

Insatiable consumption threatening Africa's species

By Jocelyne Sambira

That precious red timber furniture that's to die for? Chances are it is made from endangered African rosewood and may have been smuggled out of the continent. The same goes for that crocodile leather handbag in the closet that is helping poachers sustain a billion-dollar business.

Some 6,400 animals and over 3,000 plants in Africa were listed in 2014 as facing extinction by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Furthermore, according to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), over three million hectares of forests are being lost each year to feed a growing population on the continent as well as meet international demands for biofuels.

Fashion models wearing clothes made from animal fur. Many fashion designers work with fur, helping sustain an illegal trade that is behind the deaths of millions of animals for their skins.

Alamy/Agencja Fotograficzna Caro

The insatiable appetite for these products does not come from the fashion industry only. Over-harvesting for trade is another threat to wildlife and plant species. The freshwater tilapia fish is the most targeted for food in Africa. Orchids and the aloe vera medicinal plant are also threatened with local or total extinction because of their popularity in western markets.

6,400 animals
in Africa were listed in 2014 as facing extinction by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

UNEP warns that the illegal wildlife trade as well as the demand and consumption of natural resources are some of the factors behind Africa's ongoing loss of biodiversity. Pollution created by urbanization and industrialization is another cause.

The agency recently released a preview of its upcoming report, the State of Biodiversity in Africa, calling on the leaders of the continent to address these challenges through increased law enforcement, implementing conservation efforts at a larger scale and strengthening the links between wildlife management and community development.

The Global Biodiversity Outlook report produced by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a global agreement to protect nature and to allow nations to get a fair share of its benefits, has similar findings.

The spokesperson for the CBD Secretariat, David Ainsworth, told *Africa Renewal* that the report paints a "sobering picture" but that positive steps were being taken on the ground. "We are seeing that where we get communities to come together and manage local resources or when you get different levels of government collaborating together they can actually address some of these biodiversity challenges and turn the tide."

African countries are taking steps by partnering with their neighbours to address biodiversity loss, but the clock is ticking fast. ●

QUOTABLES

UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

"Too often, leaders have used women to advance their own power. We must use our power to advance women."

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, in opening session of the 2015 Commission on the Status of Women

"Today, I once again assure the international community that Kenya's resolve to preserve humanity's shared heritage in wildlife, our commitment to save our great species, especially the elephant and the rhino, remains as strong as ever."

Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, speaking on wildlife crime

"Marriage is often the end for girls like me. But if our leaders invest in us and give us the chance to be educated, we will become women who create a better society for everyone."

Memory Banda, 18-year-old Malawian, on child marriage

Photo: Let Girls Lead

Miners in a lift cage at the Chambishi copper mine in Kitwe, Zambia. Panos/Sven Torfinn

How healthy is Africa's sovereign bond debt?

Analysts caution against accumulating too much

By **Masimba Tafirenyika**

When Uganda dropped plans last year to raise money by issuing dollar-denominated debt, some experts faulted the decision and its timing as ill-advised when interest rates on global capital markets were at historic lows. By stepping back, the country resisted a trend that has gradually become a bond-selling spree in Africa, an attractive alternative for getting money on the cheap to finance crucial infrastructure with less strings attached. And Uganda did not go quietly; it warned other African countries to stay away from dollar-denominated debt because if not properly managed, it could become a major millstone when economic fortunes change.

According to the UK-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in a recent report on sub-Saharan Africa sovereign bonds, the region has significantly increased its borrowing through bond sales from $6 billion in 2012 to a record $11 billion in 2014. This year several other countries are expected to tap into the market for sovereign bonds, which are debt securities issued by a country and usually denominated in foreign currency.

The current economic outlook offers sub-Saharan Africa a chance to develop infrastructure on the cheap. Despite apprehensions over falling commodity prices, most significantly oil, Africa still ranks as the second fastest-growing region in the world after Asia. A slump in the rest of the global economy ignited strong appetite among investors for higher yielding debt outside the traditional markets of Europe and the US. The resultant recession drove interest rates in rich countries to historic low levels – even negative in others, forcing investors to seek profitable ventures in developing countries, especially in Africa, where growth has averaged 5% annually over the past decade.

A decade ago, African countries were unable to raise money through bond sales because their economies were considered too risky by international investors. Most were not even rated by credit companies. Today, however, the quest for profitable investments is being powered by an optimistic narrative of Africa's economic prospects dubbed "Africa Rising", fuelled by high commodity prices, sound economic policies and improved governance. As a consequence, and for the first time, several African countries found themselves eligible to raise money by issuing bonds.

First to test the waters was Seychelles, which in 2006 was the first in sub-Saharan Africa, outside South Africa, to issue bonds. It was quickly followed by Ghana, which raised $750 million in 2007, and later joined by several others that included Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Rwanda, Namibia, Zambia and most recently, first-time issuers led by Ethiopia and Kenya, which in 2014 raised $1.5 billion and $2 billion respectively. Kenya's entry into the bond

market in June was one of the largest ever debut deals from an African country, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. Virtually all the bond sales were hugely over-subscribed, a testimony to the investors' appetite for risk in frontier markets.

Despite the current positive economic outlook for Africa, its debt could pose acute challenges in the face of economic headwinds turned negative from falling commodity prices, a slowing Chinese economy that has been gobbling African commodities, and declining global demand for exports. There is growing concern that the countries likely to be hit hardest by soaring debt repayments are those that cashed in on low interest rates by issuing bonds. Uganda's ominous warning against piling up debts could prove prophetic.

Already, Ghana and Zambia have appealed to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for help in repaying debts acquired through sovereign bonds. Declining prices for gold and cocoa, rising trade and fiscal deficits and a burgeoning debt forced Ghana to reach an agreement with the IMF in February for a $1 billion loan. The money is expected to shore up an economy saddled with unsustainable debt levels of more than 60% of gross domestic product. While Ghana's misfortunes underscore the risks associated with borrowing in dollars, the deal with the IMF was expected to restore investor confidence in what was until recently one of Africa's high-flying economies.

Zambia has also opened loan negotiations with the IMF after it was stung by declining prices for copper, its main export commodity, which accounts for more than two-thirds of total export earnings. As if this was not enough, Zambia had unwisely spent a big chunk of the money from the sovereign debt on salary increases for its public servants. According to the ODI, Mozambique borrowed $850 million for its national fishing industry but instead spent the money on military boats and equipment.

Not all debt is bad debt

Despite Uganda's misgivings, acquiring debt is not inherently a bad policy; what matters is how the money is spent. Most African countries that raised money from sovereign bonds have used it to pay for infrastructure investment like transport and energy in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Nigeria, Senegal and Zambia. Others, like Côte d'Ivoire and Zambia, used the money to pay for development-related current expenditures such as health and education. The recent outbreak of the Ebola virus has illustrated the need to invest in Africa's poor health systems.

Workers repairing a barrier on a road in South Africa. *WB/Trevor Samson*

There are several advantages attached to government borrowing through bond sales: they offer an alternative source of finance; the money is not subject to the conditions usually attached to loans from rich countries or multilateral organizations; critical infrastructure can be financed at cheap rates generated by relaxed monetary policies pursued by developed countries; and bonds carry less stringent terms with reasonable periods of repayment. For investors, bond sales by Africa are more desirable because they give them the opportunity to diversify risks and reap higher returns than they would get in rich countries.

$850mn
borrowed by Mozambique for its national fishing industry but instead spent on military boats and equipment

Potential risks from bonds

However, debt acquired through bond sales is a double-edged sword. To attract international investors, the debt is issued in foreign currency, usually in dollars or euros. This makes the debt vulnerable to currency risks whenever the value of the dollar or euro strengthens. According to the ODI, sub-Saharan Africa could face more than $10 billion in losses, or 1.1% of its GDP, servicing debt acquired in 2013 and 2014 should exchange rates take a hit from a strong dollar. Furthermore, debts can destabilize economies if investors decide to reduce their exposure to African debt, notes the ODI. Bond sales could also have negative impact in terms of cost and maturity compared to concessional loans from international financial institutions.

Given the potential risks from bonds, the current enthusiasm has prompted analysts to start questioning the wisdom of piling up dollar-denominated debt. A downturn in the global economy or market volatility could have a negative effect on African debt, as evidenced by the Ebola outbreak and the plunge in oil prices. The US Federal Reserve has also signalled it might end the era of rock-bottom interest rates, which could also spell problems for African bond issuers who will be faced with rising debt repayments. Countries like Angola and Nigeria, for instance, which depend heavily on oil revenues, are already feeling the pinch.

IMF managing director Christine Lagarde warned African countries last year against accruing high debt. "Governments should be attentive and they should be cautious about not overloading their countries with too much debt," she told the *Financial Times*.

Thanks to previous measures that rescheduled or cancelled Africa's debt, robust economic growth and concessional interest rates, Africa's debt burden today is still within manageable range and relatively low compared with the strength of its economies. Hence, it's not yet crunch time for African debtors who have taken advantage of current low interest rates and favourable markets conditions to issue bonds. Prudent use of the borrowed funds backed by sound economic policies will see them weather the storm from declining commodity prices and future interest rate hikes.

This year marks 20 years since the Beijing Declaration, considered the most comprehensive blueprint on gender equality and the advancement of women. Since then, some progress has been made and lessons learned. However, the battle for gender equality is far from being won.

Gender equality within reach

Some progress made, but challenges remain

By **Zipporah Musau**

Students from the Midwifery School of El Fasher, North Darfur, commemorate International Women's Day. *UN Photo/Albert González Farran*

When the Rwandan delegation went to Beijing, China, in 1995 for the landmark women's conference, just a year after the genocide in their country, the East African nation was cited as one of the worst violators of women's rights. Today, as the world marks 20 years since the Beijing Declaration on gender equality, Rwanda leads other countries with women making up 64% of parliamentarians.

In the words of Rwandan President Paul Kagame, "No one benefits if women are held back. We have to change mindsets, not just the laws". The trend in Rwanda is positive. If it continues, the country may just meet the new 2030 deadline for gender equality in all sectors of the economy.

This year marks the beginning of a new era for women and girls around the world. In addition to being the 20-year milestone after the Beijing conference, the year will see the conclusion of the Millennium Development Goals and the launching of a new global development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals. It is also 15 years since the groundbreaking UN Security Council resolution 1325, which recognized the need to increase women's role in fostering peace and security particularly in post-conflict countries.

At their annual summit this year, African Union leaders also declared 2015 as the Year of Women's Empowerment. All these declarations should signal to governments the need for speedy change.

After 20 years of intense advocacy for women's rights, there is a palpable feeling of disenchantment with the slow pace of progress. Some of the challenges women faced in 1995 stubbornly remain.

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the executive director of UN Women, the global body dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment, said progress towards fulfilling commitments made in Beijing has been painfully slow and uneven. "At this rate it will take us 81 years to achieve gender equality...We have a reason to be concerned," she told *Africa Renewal* in an interview.

Although the number of women in parliament has doubled globally in the last 20 years, in Africa only one in every five members of parliament is a woman, which is still remains below the 30% threshold for minimum representation from either gender. Although Africa has some of the top performers in women's representation, it also has the highest number of countries that are under-performing.

In agriculture, about 70% of the crops are produced by women, yet they still own only 2% of the land, says Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka. In addition, women earn 30% less than men for the same work.

Violence against women has reached alarming proportions, with one in every three women in Africa experiencing some form of violence in her lifetime. Many girls still face the threat of female genital mutilation, early or forced marriages and unwanted pregnancies. Extremists also threaten to turn back the few fragile gains women have made.

Despite these obstacles, important advances have been made, including bridging the gender gap in primary education, improving maternal health, fighting HIV/AIDS and new laws to fight discrimination and harmful cultural practices enacted. Going forward, it is clear that achieving gender equality post-2015 will require not just transforming economies to reduce inequalities, but also getting countries to accelerate the implementation of commitments they made to women 20 years ago.

Investing in women's employment essential for economic growth

By **Jocelyne Sambira**

Magette Wade was in her San Francisco apartment getting ready for the day when she had her "light bulb" moment. Although her beauty cabinet was full of organic and natural products, Ms. Wade says she still reached for the plant-based creams made by herbalists in her native Senegal. In that moment, Tiossano, a luxury skin care company, was born.

It wasn't Ms. Wade's first attempt at introducing indigenous products to the US market. Before switching hats, she was the chief executive officer of Adina World Beat Beverages, a multi-million dollar company that makes drinks from traditional recipes. The idea for the start-up came from the popular red juice called "bissap", squeezed from the hibiscus plant.

The two companies, although based in the US, have provided work for African women and have shown that products "made in Africa" could also break into global markets. Presently, Ms. Wade is making plans to move production of her skin care merchandise to Senegal.

Billionaire and oil tycoon Folorunsho Alakija is another woman who has broken several glass ceilings in Nigeria and abroad and made it to the 2015 *Forbes'* list of world billionaires. She is the manager of Famfa Oil Ltd, a company she founded in 1991 that has the rights to explore oil and gas on the lucrative Abgami oilfield in Nigeria.

Like Ms. Wade, Ms. Alakija's first big break came when she won over the fashion industry with her couture label, Supreme Stiches, using local Nigerian fabrics. In her rise to the top, Ms. Alakija inspired and mentored a new generation of designers from her homeland.

But despite evidence that women's employment is vital to driving economic growth and development, gaps still exist with nearly half of women's productive potential globally under-utilized or unutilized, says the World Bank. In the words of Bank President Jim Yong Kim, "Investing in women's employment is not only the right thing to do – it's essential for business."

A UN-sponsored study called the Millennium Project estimates that two-thirds of self-employed entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia are women. According to the World Bank, the private sector, which accounts for 9 out of 10 jobs in developing countries, plays a critical role in creating better employment opportunities for women.

Occitane en Provence, a global, natural and organic ingredient-based cosmetic firm, has been hiring female shea butter nut pickers and processors in Burkina Faso for over 30 years. The UN Development Programme hails the company as an "exemplary business" for its inclusive business model. The agency states that the economic impact in the West African country has been significant, generating revenue for 15,000 rural women and their cooperatives.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, also runs programmes across Africa to help women gain a foothold in the private sector. For example, the IFC has helped place women in jobs traditionally held by men such as the mining sector in South Africa and Ghana. It is also spearheading the 'She works' initiative to create job opportunities for more than 300,000 women.

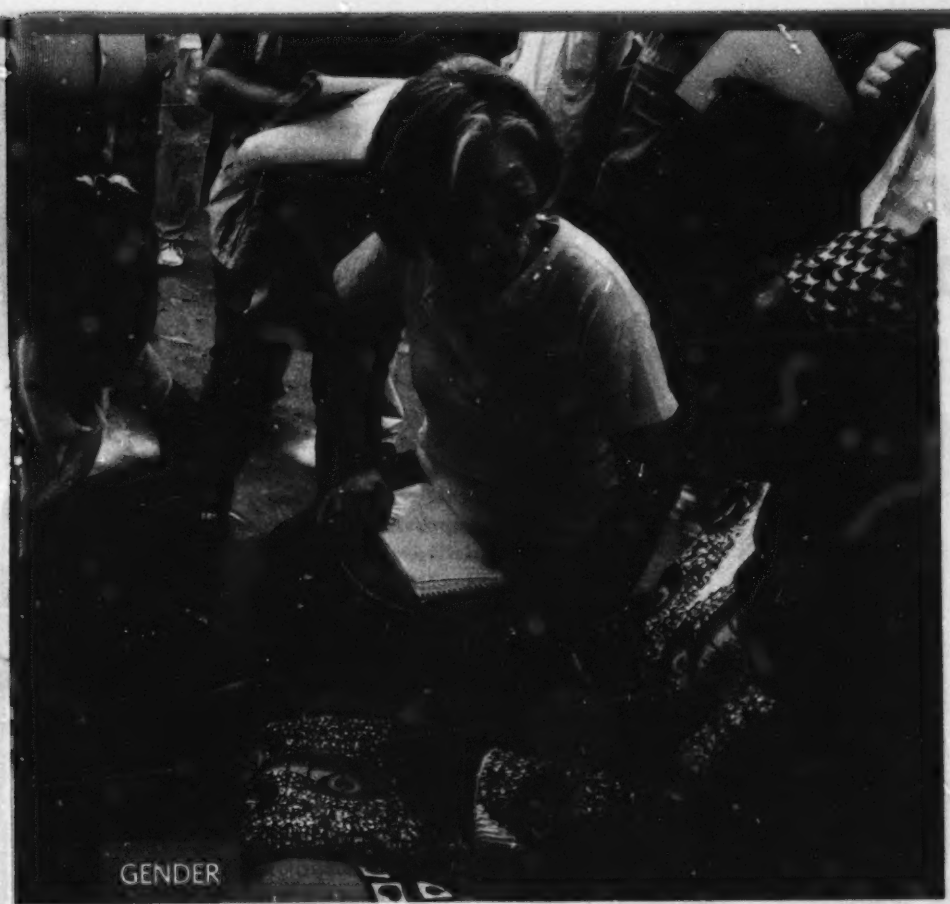
Ten participating companies have pledged to implement measures such as mentoring, flexible work arrangements and leadership training to increase diversity in management.

The private sector can also develop workplace gender-sensitive policies, and create safe and inclusive environments, argues the UN Global Compact, which has developed a framework for businesses together with UN Women on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and in the community.

According to the director-general of the International Labour Organization, Juan Somavia, increasing evidence shows that gender inequality is bad economics. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund estimates that having as many women in the labour force as men could boost economic growth by as much as 5% in the US and up to 34% in countries like Egypt.

In addition, better jobs for women leads to better development outcomes, says IFC, because women will spend what they earn on children's health, education and nutrition.

Awurabena Okrah, CEO and founder of Winglow, a textile and fashion business in Accra, Ghana. Many women are venturing into business. *Panos/Nyani Quarmyne*



UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Kyung-wha Kang (centre) during her visit to the Central African Republic in February 2015. OCHA/C. Illemassene

Women seek greater role in rebuilding the Central African Republic

By **Zipporah Musau**

The current security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) is dire—a reality that has prompted women of the CAR to make one urgent request to the international community: to be included in the conflict-stricken country's ongoing peace-building process.

Even though the CAR has never known real peace since independence in the 1960s, recent events have raised the level of turmoil, starting in March 2013 when rebels seized power, setting off near genocidal acts of violence between Muslim and Christian communities. A quarter of the population, or about one million people, was displaced.

In January 2014, when the international community intervened to bring normalcy to the country, a woman, Catherine Samba-Panza, was chosen as the interim president to lead the country out of chaos.

Since then, notable progress on security and political fronts has been made, although the humanitarian situation remains unstable, with more than 2.7 million people out of a population of 4.6 million needing humanitarian assistance. Half a million of them are still displaced within the country as internally displaced persons (IDPs), and a further half million have sought shelter as refugees in neighbouring countries.

Despite a woman in the presidency, grassroots women of the CAR were largely left out of the peace and reconciliation talks. When UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Kyung-wha Kang visited the country early this year, the women expressed their frustrations, not just over the continuing lack of security but also their exclusion from the peace-building and reconstruction processes.

"The women in the CAR want to rebuild lives that are sustainable and safe. They want to overcome the sense of fear and victimisation they are going through," said Ms. Kang, in an interview with *Africa Renewal*. "With some support and empowerment, these women could hold the key to unlocking and liberating themselves from fear and victimisation."

In times of violence and lawlessness, and even after the violence, women and children are the first to suffer. According to Ms. Kang, in a country like the CAR where women are deeply excluded, the crisis exacerbates the discriminatory social structures that had existed prior to the conflict.

Ms. Kang and her team, including the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Chaloka Beyani, and the Director of Operations at the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department, Mr. Jean-Louis de Brouwe, visited different parts of the country, including the camps for IDPs, and were alarmed that the lines between armed elements and civilians have become blurred in many displacement sites. The camps are unprotected and armed elements mingle with the IDPs freely. Incidents of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, particularly very young girls, are common and much of it attributed to the armed elements.

She noted that it was not enough to just stop the war. The peace process has to go beyond reconciliation and address some of those root causes of the conflicts in the country, which can be a long process.

Amidst these challenges, the lack of resources continues to hamper efforts to provide relief for the IDPs.

For full interview with Kyung-wha Kang visit http://www.un.org/africarenewal

INTERVIEW

Progress towards gender parity still slow, uneven

— Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women. UN Photo/Devra Berkowitz

It's been 20 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a historic roadmap that set the agenda for realizing women's rights, was signed by 189 governments. While there have been many achievements since then, several pledges remain unfulfilled. *Africa Renewal*'s Zipporah Musau spoke to the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, on Africa's accomplishments and remaining challenges. The following are excerpts from the interview:

Africa Renewal: What is the current state of gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa?

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka: Africa is home to 30% of the world's poor and many of them are women and girls. This puts a lot of pressure on those of us who work for gender equality to address the situation. It is a concern that women in Africa till the land and contribute significantly to crop production, yet they own only 2% of the land.

When it comes to education, the fact that two-thirds of Africa's women are classified as functionally illiterate means that we have a challenge to ensure that there is better access for women and girls. We also have to ensure that the girls are retained in school and those who drop out are given a second chance.

Even though women's leadership has improved, in fact, some African countries are in the top 10 countries that have the highest number of women in parliament like in Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal and South Africa, women's representation in parliaments globally is still very low. There are more countries in Africa that have very small numbers of women in parliament than those who have made progress. Again, we have only two female presidents in Africa's 54 countries.

Female representation in parliaments is improving in the region. But are you satisfied with the quality of representation?

In countries like Rwanda, where the number of women in parliament is high and can take a decisive vote in support of what they want to advance, they have used that privilege and competitive advantage. But there is still room to do more. There is need to invest in the building of the women's caucuses in parliaments in most countries, including those that have fewer women in parliament. I'm talking about women's caucuses in parliaments that are multi-party. Women must work together. The divisions that women experience as a result of party divisions eat into the strength they could gather if they were to unite across political parties. The negative impact of under-representation is detrimental to all women, no matter their political affiliation.

Do women parliamentarians always champion women's issues in parliament?

Most of the time women leaders will champion women's issues, although there are times when they make decisions that are detrimental to women. However, by and large, and not just in Africa, women in positions of authority make decisions that are good for women and girls.

How much progress has been made towards fulfilling the commitments made in Beijing?

The progress has been uneven and slow, very slow. On education, for example, many governments invested a lot. To the extent that we do not have the results we want across the board, it is not out of governments not trying. Enrolments have increased significantly, especially in countries that started at a very low base.

There has been a clear shift in how governments view and prioritise education.

On gender equality, after Beijing, governments have set up institutions such as women's ministries, gender commissions and gender focal points in different ministries. However, structures do not do the work. Most of these structures are not properly funded. In the economic arena, the number of women who have entered the labour force progressed from 40% to only 48% in 20 years. That is so slow. At this pace, it is going to take us 50 years to achieve gender parity in Africa.

On health, investment in maternal health has been strong. However, sometimes help with maternal health comes too late. We should be preventing, for instance, the complications that women and mothers experience, which have a lot to do with unwanted pregnancies. We should be talking about comprehensive sexual education which many governments have not really implemented.

Most governments have focused on the fight against HIV/AIDS, which impacts women significantly. But limited resources have worsened the problem despite efforts by many countries. However, one thing that countries did not do enough is strengthening health systems as a whole as we have seen in countries affected by the Ebola virus outbreak.

On issues like female genital mutilation (FGM), most countries now have legislation against it. We have not been able to completely eradicate it. We have to address a very worrying trend where doctors and nurses are secretly performing FGM, saying there is a 'healthy way' of doing it. There is no healthy way of doing FGM; mutilation is mutilation.

There are concerns that the gains African women have made over the years are gradually being eroded in some countries. What is your assessment?

The extremism and conflicts we are seeing in some countries are worrying. This is where the gains women have made are facing the biggest threat. Since Beijing, the countries that have had the least progress for women are those in conflict. This is where women are in the eye of the storm. The rise of fundamentalism and its hatred of girls is a major setback for women's advancement. We cannot really blame governments for this, but the burden for women is much heavier.

Gender parity in primary education is improving but huge disparities remain in the transition to secondary education and drop-out rates are high. What is being done to address these issues?

This is a multi-sectoral challenge. We need to fight early marriages because girls are driven out of school while their male peers remain in school. Men need to take a stand on this. We need to mobilize men and boys, where men must say 'I will not marry a child'. If men take up this campaign themselves, we could reduce early marriages significantly. We must also mobilize parents, including mothers, who sometimes marry off their girls. Of course, legislation is important too. But we have to push for its effective implementation.

The other challenge is that the financial crisis robbed governments of the resources needed to invest in social development. It is usually the first item to be thrown out of budgets and it has negative impact on the well-being of women and girls. That is why we are pushing for gender-responsive budgeting. A few countries like Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Morocco and South Africa are embracing it and we would like to see more doing the same.

What is your comment on access to technology in Africa?

In education, access is critical. The advantage of using technology is that you can access more young people than you can in a classroom. We need to invest in devices that can educate children Imagine how much children in poor countries could do with devices if they were made available. You could have a teacher in New York, for example, if he is one of the best in teaching a particular subject, using the technology to teach children anywhere in the world. Technology has to be seen as a pro-poor intervention and not a luxury as we sometimes tend to do. Many children do not have access to libraries and have to walk long distances to get to a library. It will take a long time to attain the number of teachers we need, yet we can provide technology at low cost.

Looking at Africa in the next 50 years, what do the women want?

In the first place, women want economic well-being. With that, women can make decisions for themselves and their children to make life better for future generations. Investment in women has very high and sustainable rates of return. Second, women want their human rights to be respected. The violence against women in many parts of the world, including in Africa – physical violence, sexual violence, FGM, early marriages, or trafficking – must stop. One of the biggest needs for women therefore is leadership. They want leadership that is concerned about women issues, cares for them and is willing to protect them from violent experiences.

Women from all over Côte d'Ivoire gather to celebrate International Women's Day at the Palais de la Culture in Abidjan. UN Photo/Ky Chung

Millions of girls remain out of school

The gender gap has narrowed, but progress is starting to stall

By **Franck Kuwonu**

Young women study in a science laboratory at Mogadishu University, Somalia. Panos/Sven Torfinn

Bright-eyed and clever, a young girl from a small village in Malawi shares her wish for a better life. From her confines, up early in the morning, cleaning and cooking, eating last, marrying young, she has little chance for school, much less a future with a career.

"Because I'm a girl, I have dreams," she says thoughtfully. "When I grow up, I want to be a doctor, a judge or maybe a scientist." With an education, she concludes, she could help her sisters and friends. "And together we could show everybody how girls make the community stronger and richer!

"Give me a chance," she says disarmingly, "and I'll take it from there." The three-minute video, produced by Plan International, a UK-based global advocacy group on children, tells the story of the near-insurmountable challenges facing school-age girls in the world's poorest regions, including many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Her story mirrors that of millions of girls around the world whose prospects are severely limited because they cannot finish school.

According to the 2014 Millennium Development Goals Report, a United Nations annual report that tracks progress towards achieving the MDGs, some 33 million children in sub-Saharan Africa were out of school in 2012. For example, Nigeria had about 5.5 million girls out of school and Ethiopia had more than a million. While the situation varies from country to country and between rural and urban areas, overall 56% of the out-of-school children are girls.

Progress is stalling

There is no doubt that a concerted global push for universal education has narrowed the gender gap in primary school enrolment between 2001 and 2008, says UNESCO, the UN agency on education and culture. Over the past seven years, however, the gap appears to have remained the same, according to the report. Pervasive poverty and persistent cultural attitudes, including forced early marriages and child labour, continue to be the main obstacles to girls' education in sub-Saharan Africa.

Other obstacles, according to the Plan International report, include the cost of education, child prostitution, early pregnancies and long distances to schools. "Poverty lies at the heart of many of the challenges that hinder girls' access to education. The pressures of poverty mean that parents must constantly make decisions about how to utilize extremely limited resources and how best to provide a secure future for their family," the report notes.

Poor families, mostly in rural areas, are forced to send boys to school while keeping the girls at home helping with chores in the belief that chores are sufficient lessons for girls to learn how to keep a family. Even as more girls are enrolled in primary schools, their chances of dropping out continue to be greater than boys'. Girls may be withdrawn from school by parents for reasons linked not only to costs but to unwanted pregnancies from rape at the hands of male teachers or other male adults in their communities.

As part of the MDGs and the Education for All agenda, a mix of awareness campaigns and policy measures has increased enrolments and narrowed the gender gap in several African countries including Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Tanzania, The Gambia and Uganda. Specific policies initiated more than two decades ago and carried into the 21st century helped to improve the numbers considerably. These policies included reducing or completely eliminating school fees in public institutions in impoverished areas, making school environments gender-sensitive, such as assisting pregnant students and increasing the number of female teachers.

However, the impact of these policies seems to have hit a wall. Reasons behind the declining enrolment for girls, according to UNESCO, include sagging global economic growth, increased emergency situations

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Actors in a skit depicting violence against women. The vice is on the increase in Zimbabwe and other countries in Africa. Joseph Mathenge

Humiliation: The latest form of gender violence

Groups ask men and boys to shun the practice

By **Sally Nyakanyanga**

Commuter bus terminals in Zimbabwe are slowly becoming the new battlegrounds in an undeclared war against women. Often, small gangs of touts pounce on women and girls at bus stations in major cities, accuse them of indecent dressing and sometimes strip them naked in public.

The worst example of this new variation of misogynist violence happened last December when a group of touts attacked a woman at one of the major bus stations in the capital, Harare, and stripped her naked for the "crime" of wearing a mini-skirt. She managed to escape after paying a commuter omnibus crew $2 to hide her from the mob. Police arrested two of the attackers who are still in custody awaiting trial, but the other suspects are still at large.

The public stripping of women accused of indecent dressing is the latest in a series of attacks against women in Zimbabwe based solely on gender. The problem is exacerbated by the country's worsening economic conditions that have been straining family relations. Other forms of gender-based violence include intimate partner or spousal violence, rape and sexual assault, pedophilia, family rape, sexual coercion and harassment, human trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse especially of girls.

As in other parts of the world, many cases of violence against women in Zimbabwe go unreported. But the few that make it into the docket books paint a troubling picture. Worse still, these cases are not always treated as crimes. "As a society, we need to understand that violence against women is a criminal offense and therefore cannot be excused," Virginia Muwanigwa, the chairperson of the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, a group that champions the rights of women and girls in Zimbabwe, told *Africa Renewal* in an interview.

Musasa Project, a group that provides shelter, legal advice, social counselling and skills training to survivors of violence, last year handled more than 21,500 cases of violence against women compared to 10,402 cases in 2013. According to the group's programme officer, Vimbai Njovana, these were mainly sexual and domestic violence cases in just four cities. The project processes an average of 30 to 50 cases of gender violence in its Harare office alone.

UN Women's Gender Specialist, Michelle Gudo, said her organisation runs a three-year programme dedicated to the prevention of violence against adolescent girls and young women.

"Offering support to women is not enough," says Ms. Njovana. "We need economic empowerment projects to spruce them up financially. Women are the face of poverty as most of them look up to their spouses for financial support."

Figures on domestic violence from police authorities are especially distressing. Last year the police handled more than 4,600 cases of domestic violence in the capital city, up from 2,505 the previous year.

As the rate of violence against women continues to rise, gender advocacy groups have developed a new approach in their campaign against the scourge. The exercise involves enlisting men's organizations and urging them to turn their members against gender-based violence. One such organization is the Padare Men's Forum on Gender, which focuses on men's involvement in promoting gender equality in Zimbabwe.

In addition to enlisting men in its new anti-violence campaign, the Forum has increased its advocacy for strong legal frameworks against gender violence and working with women organizations to foster gender equality.

"We engage men in positions of power such as chiefs, pastors, village heads, members of parliament and local councillors to help curb GBV [gender-based violence] in the country," says Kelvin Hazangwi.

Zimbabwean laws such as the Domestic Violence Act of 2007 exist on the books but are not strictly enforced because of limited resources, poor coordination among various actors and public resistance based on patriarchal and religious beliefs. On the part of the government, the acting Minister for Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Christopher Mushowe, says his ministry is working to ensure that its GBV strategy is implemented successfully.

A celebratory rise in women's political participation

Number of women legislators inches upward in Africa

By **Kingsley Ighobor**

Swearing-in of Members of Parliament and other government officials in Kigali, Rwanda. Paul Kagame

A few weeks after she was sworn in as Malawi's first female president, Joyce Banda travelled to Liberia in late April 2012 to meet President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who has occupied Liberia's highest office since January 2006. Glowing in African attire, both leaders bantered like sisters during a press conference.

"This is our day, this is our year, this is our decade," enthused Ms. Banda. "The two of us have great strength," added Ms. Sirleaf. "Together, we can do more to empower women and to ensure that women's role in society is enhanced."

After the media event, Duncan Cassell, Liberia's gender minister, said, "Now we have Joyce [Banda]. Ms. Sirleaf is not going to be lonely among men anymore."

To be sure, before Ms. Banda became president, photos of African leaders at African Union summits, for example, depicted a group of men surrounding Ms. Sirleaf, who had been the only female president in Africa then.

Gender equality advocates had further reason to celebrate when Catherine Samba-Panza was sworn in on 23 January 2014 as interim president of the Central African Republic (CAR), making her the fourth African female head of state. The first was Ruth Perry, who headed the Liberian transitional government for about a year from September 1996. Regrettably, Ms. Banda, the second woman to be seated as president, became the first to be unseated when she lost the elections, in what some say was a retaking of power by loyalists of the late President Bingu wa Mutharika.

Rwanda leads the world

"One of the most fascinating developments in African politics has been the increase in women's political participation since the mid-1990s," writes Aili Mari Tripp, a professor of gender and women's studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the US. Besides the four female heads of state, Ms. Tripp bases her upbeat assessment on the increasing number of women parliamentarians on the continent.

Indeed, with 64% of seats held by women, Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians in the world. Senegal, Seychelles and South Africa have more than 40% each, and Mozambique, Angola, Tanzania and Uganda are not far off, with women occupying over 35% of all parliamentary seats. Considering that women hold only 19% of the seats in the US congress and 20% in the senate, Ms. Tripp maintains that Africa has every right to be proud. What she did not say is that American women hold top positions in ministries, military and other top government departments, which is not the case in most African countries.

However, a survey on women's participation in politics in 34 African countries by Afrobarometer, a research group that measures public perceptions of socioeconomic and political issues in Africa, notes that while countries such as Rwanda and South Africa may have numerically significant women's parliamentary representation, some of the world's worst performers are also on the continent. For example, women have only 6.2% representation in Swaziland, 6.7% in Nigeria and 8.4% in Benin.

Most Africans demand equality

Nevertheless, the good news is that a vast majority of Africans (72%) agree that women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men, the Afrobarometer study found. The problem, again, is that this majority opinion on gender equality does not exist in some parts of the continent. While 74% of respondents in East Africa believe in women's equality and 73% in Southern Africa, only 50% in North Africa agree that women should have the same rights as men. In fact, women's leadership was rejected by 53% of respondents in Sudan and by 50% in Egypt.

There are many reasons why women's participation in politics is the key to good governance. Experts say women are key to

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Looking beyond the rhetoric of an African Union year for women

What women want in 2015 - the Year of Women's Empowerment

By **Ecoma Alaga** and **Ndidi Anyaegbunam**

At this year's annual summit of the African Union, attending leaders declared 2015 the Year of Women's Empowerment in acknowledgement of the increasing role women are playing in Africa's development. The declaration comes as the continent prepares to kick-start the implementation of its 50-year development plan that was launched in 2013. Dubbed Agenda 2063, the plan is a pan-African vision that is expected to steer the continent towards "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena".

The declaration is also a display of AU's renewed political commitment and support for the women's empowerment and gender equality agenda. Critics have welcomed the move, but note that Africa must go beyond talking and match its words with concrete action and allocate appropriate resources if there is going to be any meaningful change in the lives of African women and girls. This will require a change from simply adopting policies to fully enforcing existing pro-women policies and initiatives.

A few days before the summit at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, more than 200 women and advocates of women's rights from all over Africa gathered to reflect on progress, current gaps and emerging issues in implementing existing commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. Participants, including AU senior officials, recommended that 2015 should be "seized as an opportunity to focus on the implementation of practical solutions that will provide measurable results for women".

The emphasis on results is not surprising. Most African countries are signatories to many national and international policies and frameworks on gender equality and women's empowerment, including the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. In addition, African countries constitute a third of the countries with national action plans designed to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Furthermore, the AU has an institutionalised gender platform that is charged with transforming gender policies into action.

What African women want

Yet measurable results from these policies have been uneven, inconsistent and painfully slow. This poor scorecard has been attributed to existing patriarchal culture in African societies as well as attempts to renegotiate existing commitments and policies on gender, and more importantly, lack of resources.

Many gender experts say that for Africa to achieve its goals on women's empowerment, there has to be effective enforcement of current policies, requiring a shifting of mind sets and the allocation of more resources. The focus should also be on areas where there has been the least progress, including agriculture, economic empowerment, health and peace and security.

African women want the commemorative year to focus on enhancing women's ownership of land and access to environment-friendly technology. They want AU members, in collaboration with the African Development Bank and the private sector, to establish a special investment fund for women and young girls to be used for venture capital financing.

Finally, women want the proposed roadmap for the implementation of Agenda 2063's flagship project of silencing all guns by 2020 to include their participation in conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding, as well as an end to all forms of conflict-related sexual violence. And, because their traditional care giving role exposes them to greater pandemic-related risks, African women are demanding to be included in formulating and implementing public health policy.

Ecoma Alaga and Ndidi Anyaegbunam are programme officers in the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa.

Women, Peace and Security meeting in Addis. *African Union Commission*

Women's Situation Room: Africa's unique approach to reducing electoral violence

How an innovative real-time intervention in Kenya used women's strengths to protect voters and help keep the peace before and after voting day

By **Jane Godia**

Violence during an election cycle is an all-too-frequent phenomenon in most African countries where it may be triggered by political or ethnic tensions, or flawed electoral processes. Tragically, those most affected by the violence are women and girls. As governments grapple with the problem, women in Africa have invented a new mechanism to help reduce violence during elections – the Women's Situation Room (WSR).

The WSR is a peace-building project that empowers women to be the leading force for democratic and peaceful elections. The concept was first introduced by Yvette Chesson-Wureh, the coordinator for the Liberia-based Angie Brooks International Centre, an NGO on women's empowerment.

"The [WSR] is a real-time and progressive process that works with communities in advocating, mediating and intervening in violent and tense situations during elections in countries where it's situated," says Ms. Chesson-Wureh.

The process was first used during the 2011 elections in Liberia and has since been successfully replicated in Kenya, Senegal and Sierra Leone. There are also plans to use it in this year's elections in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Togo. According to WSR organizers, situations could differ in individual countries, so the concept is adaptable to suit local conditions.

As a result of its demonstrated effectiveness in preventing and mitigating election-related violence in Liberia, the WSR was adopted as a best practice in Africa at the Africa Union summit in January 2012.

The situation room at work

Since the advent of multi-party politics in 1991, violence has marred Kenyan elections. However, the 2007 post-election violence was the worst the country has ever seen. It affected all but two of the country's eight provinces. More than 1,500 people died in the violence and another 600,000 were forced to flee, according to the Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence, which was set up by the government to investigate the causes of violence and the conduct of security agencies and to come up with recommendations. The post-election violence prompted activists to propose several initiatives that would ensure a peaceful electoral process during the run-up to the March 2013 elections. Because of its track record in other African countries as an effective tool in preventing and minimising electoral violence, the WSR was among the selected initiatives.

1,500 people
died in the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya

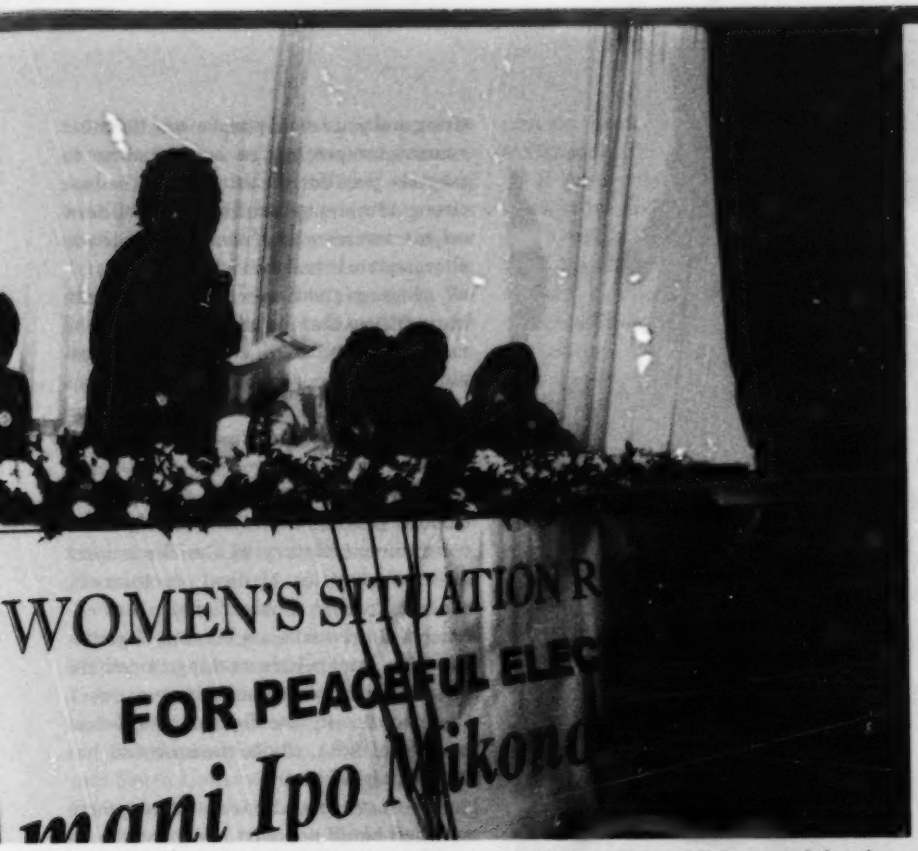
With technical support from the Angie Brooks International Centre and funding from UN Women and the UNDP, WSR Kenya was born. The structure was simple – consisting of a secretariat, election observers, a call centre, a team of eminent women leaders and a pool of experts. Operating from its offices in the capital Nairobi, the secretariat organized the day-to-day activities of the WSR and rolled out strategies that were implemented before, during and after the 2013 elections.

Women leaders and representatives of Kenya's electoral bo electoral violence during Kenya's last general elections.

It recruited and trained 500 women and youths as special election observers in areas that were identified as potential hotspots for violence, which included Nairobi, Naivasha and Mombasa. Using a toll-free, well-publicized telephone number, the election observers reported to the Situation Room all incidents of violence or threats to peace that were happening across the country.

Inside the Situation Room, a team of Kenyan leaders and eminent persons from other African countries sat in one corner. In another room, telephone operators took calls from election observers deployed across the country to monitor the hotspots. The operators recorded the time of the call and its nature, and then passed on the information to technical experts in law, media and political science.

The three technical experts then verified and analyzed the information before passing it on to a team of Kenyan women leaders who had influence with



the police and the UN sit at the Women's Situation Room in Nairobi, Kenya that used diplomacy to help reduce
eph Mathenge

local politicians. The eminent women were Phoebe Asiyo, Zipporah Kittony, Betty Maina, Wanjiku Kabira, Rahab Muhiu, Tegla Loroupe and Jane Kiano. They were supported by their counterparts drawn from the region, including Gertrude Mongella, a former Tanzanian minister and expert on gender issues, Miria Matembe (Uganda), Elizabeth Lwanga (Uganda), Turrie Akerele-Ismail (Nigeria) and Ms. Chesson-Wureh. The only man in the team was Kiprono Kittony, a prominent media owner in Kenya who helped mobilize media support. Additionally, there were high-profile representatives from the Kenya Police Service and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), the body charged with managing elections in Kenya.

After receiving situation reports of real or potential trouble on the ground, the eminent persons used their status and influence with police authorities, the electoral body or political leaders to reduce brewing tensions or acts of violence from getting out of control. They also conducted behind-the-scenes diplomacy, arbitrated and mediated between rival groups and political parties. Meanwhile, in the Situation Room itself, visitors wrote peace messages and signed their names to a piece of white cloth symbolizing their support for peaceful polls.

600,000 people
were forced to flee in the 2007 post-election violence

Real-time solutions

At the end of the observation process, the WSR had recorded more than 1,200 reports that were received and resolved in real time. The incidence categories included voting complaints, gender-based violence, electoral offences and obstruction of observers. There were also cases of spontaneous violence following the announcement of results.

At one point, there was tension nationwide when the IEBC delayed announcing the election results. The WSR, through the team of eminent persons, successfully reached out to the electoral commission to fast-track the process. The team also prevailed upon the two leading presidential contenders to appeal to their supporters to refrain from violence. In the end, the importance of WSR's work was acknowledged by various stakeholders in the Kenyan election.

"Women are usually the victims of the election violence and are rarely involved in observing or mitigating the violence. In terms of real-time observations, [WSR] was very successful," said Deborah Okumu, the executive director of the Caucus for Women's Leadership, a national network that works to empower women leaders. "There were top notch interventions from the team of eminent persons who were able to calm down situations."

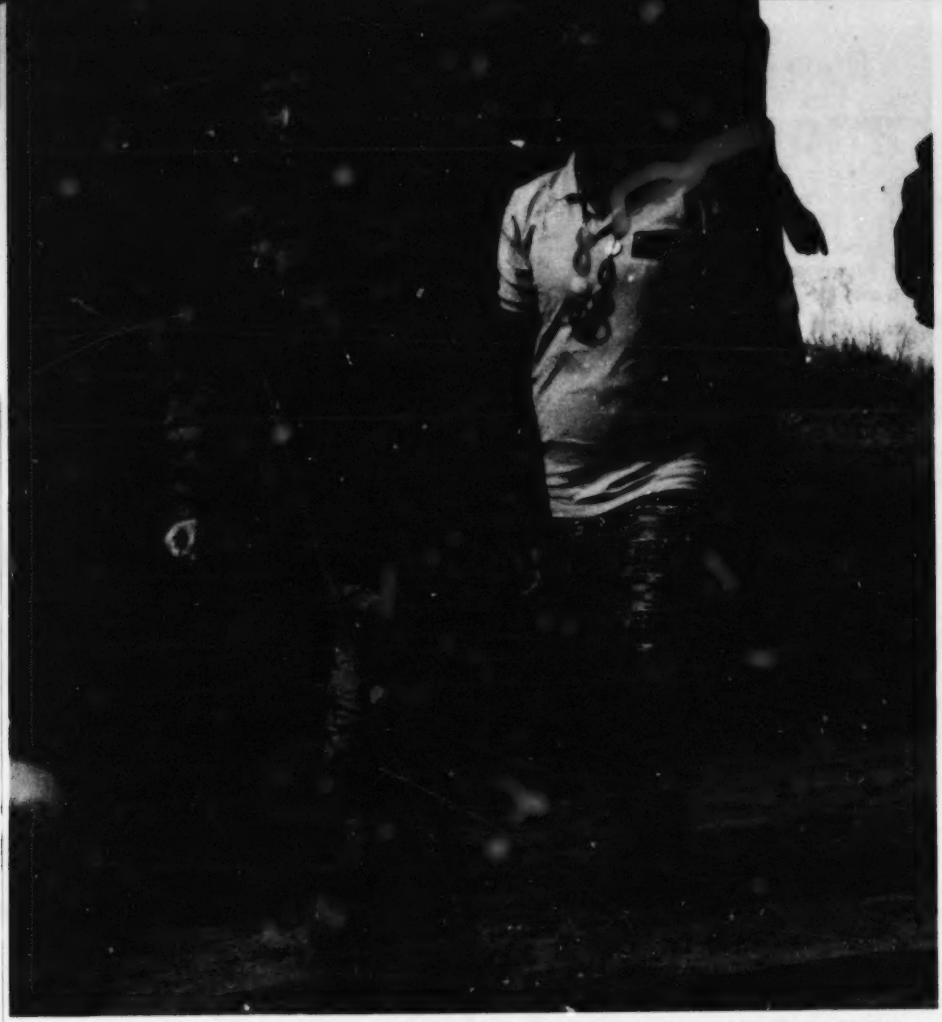
Among the high profile personalities, diplomats and election observers who visited the Situation Room office were Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the chairperson of the African Union Commission, and former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano, the head of the AU Observer Mission.

Lessons learned

According to Ms. Chesson-Wureh, the Women's Situation Room succeeded in training and deploying more than 500 election observers to hotspots. They resolved reported electoral violence incidents or threats in real time, and held fruitful meetings with the major political players including then Prime Minister Raila Odinga and media stakeholders on the need for peaceful electioneering. However, the organizers conceded that there was need for more time to train volunteers on the peace process, particularly the peer-to-peer dialogue against violence among youth.

Daisy Amdany, the co-convener of the National Women Steering Committee, a consortium of women's advocacy groups, said she felt that the set-up of the WSR in Kenya was good for women but it should have been brought in earlier than a month before the elections.

"It was a good platform to enforce women's rights and give women a voice because it was able to get the attention of the police and the elections body," said Ms. Amdany, adding, "It can be useful if put in place once again for the 2017 general election."



Beatrice Yardolo, right, Liberia's last Ebola patient, walks out of the Chinese Ebola Treatment Unit (ETU) in Monrovia, Liberia, at the beginning of a short ceremony celebrating her survival and release from the ETU on March 5. UNMEER/Simon Ruf

Ebola: A bumpy road to zero transmission

Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone remain vigilant as infections decline in the three countries

By **Kingsley Ighobor** in Freetown, Sierra Leone

Paolo Conteh, Sierra Leone's defence minister and head of the country's National Ebola Response Centre, was an athlete who set a 400-metres national record in 1982 that remains unbeaten to this day. These days, Mr. Conteh uses a sporting analogy to explain the fight against the Ebola virus disease, which has resulted in more than 22,000 infections and over 9,000 deaths in the three most affected countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea.

At a discussion forum in the Sierra Leonean capital, Freetown, in January, the moderator asked Mr. Conteh to explain the state of Ebola then.

"Let's put it this way," the former sprinter began. "We are running a 400m race and we have just 20m to go. Already, your legs are tiring and you are gasping for breath. Other runners are coming fast and are about to overtake you. But you must finish the race strong. At that stage, you dig deeper and draw on your last reserves of energy. You must do all you can to breast the victory tape."

Although there were some chuckles in the audience that included 80 Ebola social mobilizers, who are in communities sensitizing people on Ebola, the message was clear: the race against Ebola cannot be won unless there is a strong, final push.

Declining transmission

On the ground, there is a strong sense of imminent victory in the three most affected countries. Medical practitioners, contact tracers, burial teams, surveillance teams, social mobilizers, logistics providers, and others working to end the virus are in a somewhat boisterous mood. Compared with the figures in the last months of 2014, Ebola transmission has declined significantly.

"We have moved from a phase where we were being hounded and hunted to a situation where we are now hunting Ebola," said Amadu Kamara, former Sierra Leone's Crisis Manager for the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER).

By the end of January 2015, there were only three patients in the African Union-run Magbinthi Treatment Centre, in northern Sierra Leone. "With few Ebola patients, we are planning to start treating others who test negative to Ebola but may have other illnesses," the coordinator of the Centre, Dr. John Ssentanu, told *Africa Renewal* then. They were treating diseases such as malaria or typhoid until the clinic was finally shut down in February.

The sudden decline in Ebola transmission is a welcome surprise. The US, which had sent some 2,800 troops to Liberia, announced in mid-February that its troops would pull out by the end of April 2015. "We have bent the curve of the epidemic and placed it on a much improved trajectory," read a White House statement.

Storm in a tea cup

But it was just in September 2014 that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicted that there could be 1.4 million Ebola cases in Africa by 20 January 2015. With a projected 70% fatality, that could have meant about a million deaths. While some experts say that the doomsday

scenario was a storm in a tea cup because it was not based on any proper epidemiological analysis, Martin Meltzer, who led the CDC study, insists that projections were made "on the assumption that no further interventions and no further changes in human behaviour would take place. We knew, or we very much hoped that we would be wrong."

However, there is a downside to the declining transmission numbers. "We are no longer seeing the buckets of chlorinated water in shops, supermarkets and other places. People are becoming tired and stubborn," says Monte Jones, a special adviser to Sierra Leonean President Ernest Koroma.

In Guinea, President Alpha Condé also warned: "It's precisely because things are getting better that we have to stay vigilant in order to get to zero cases," adding that there should be no room for complacency.

The leaders of the Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone are walking a tightrope, trying to return their countries to normal life yet warning that the Ebola fight was not over yet. Last November, Liberia lifted the state of emergency declared in the wake of high transmission and reopened schools in mid-February 2015. Sierra Leone eased travel and trade restrictions and reopened schools in March.

But in response to a recent spike in new cases, the government put 25 government hospitals on special duty with new infection and prevention control (IPC) units—the first of their kind in the country.

On the road to zero

Even though "zero" is the buzzword in the three most affected countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) protocols stipulate that a country can only be declared Ebola-free if it records zero transmission and has had no new cases for another 42 days from the day it records zero cases.

At an extraordinary meeting in February 2015, presidents Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Koroma and Condé and a representative of President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire met under the umbrella of the Mano River Union (MRU), a sub-regional grouping, and resolved to arrive at zero infections within 60 days. That would mean until mid-April 2015. The leaders hoped to get support from foreign partners, intensify social mobilization and surveillance, enhance coordination and provide mental and psychosocial support to victims.

If these countries achieve zero transmission by mid-April, the 42-day countdown would lead to end of May. If so, then, hopefully, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea – perhaps the world – could be declared Ebola-free.

Setting a 60-day target is the easy part; achieving it is much more difficult. "We are going to have a bumpy road to zero," said Mr. Kamara, the former crisis manager of UNMEER in Sierra Leone. "We should not expect a linear progression. There will be a few surprises along the way."

Sub-regional dimension

A presentation by Dr. Daniel Kertesz, the then WHO Sierra Leone representative, reinforces Mr. Amadu's prognosis. Drawing from previous outbreaks in Gulu in Uganda and Booué in Gabon, Dr. Kertesz said that the tail end of an Ebola outbreak "can have a bumpy landing; can last for two to three months; or can get to zero and recur."

Dr. Kertesz said any decline in transmission should be treated with caution as should any spikes. "We are not in control of the epidemic yet. Recent cases demonstrate that quiet areas can flare up if we miss or lose control of chains of transmission."

The sub-regional dimension of Ebola also complicates the race to zero transmission. MRU's secretary-general Saran Daraba Kaba says Ebola cannot be defeated unless its regional implications are addressed.

The MRU countries have a combined population of 45 million of which 2.2 million are engaged in cross-border activities such as trading and transportation, according to a report by the union. In addition, border communities forge socio-economic and cultural relationships. "This has led to a situation where suspected border [Ebola] cases and confirmed cases have moved across borders in public road transport or even on foot," notes the report.

The MRU is therefore urging member states to regulate how patients, corpses and laboratory samples are transferred across borders. Defence minister Conteh agrees with the MRU, even adding that if Liberia has zero cases and no transmission for 42 days, the country should not be considered Ebola-free until Sierra Leone and Guinea attained similar status. The virus should be treated as "one epidemic with many fronts," concurs Mr. Kamara.

Meanwhile, individual countries may keep an eye on happenings across their borders, but it doesn't stop them from crowing about progress. Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone – and indeed the world –are hoping that very soon every county, every district and every country will be Ebola-free.

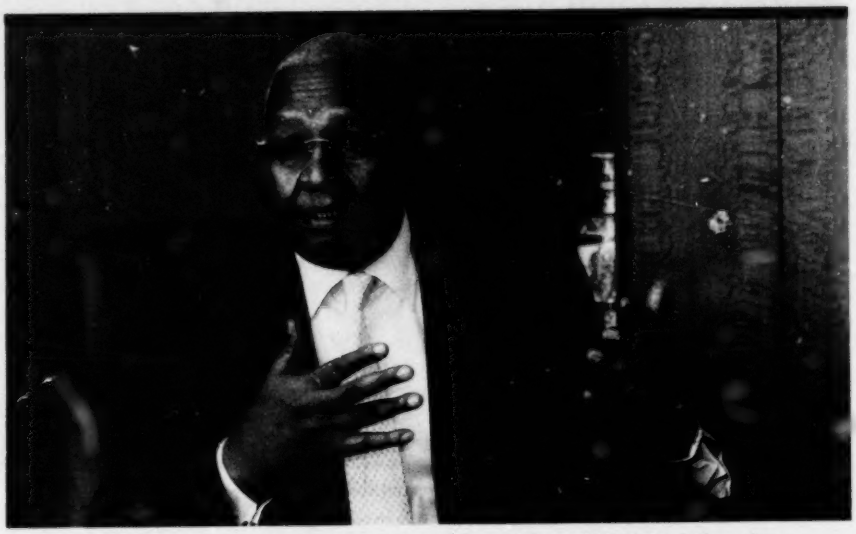
After being kept closed for three months due to the Ebola outlook, schools across Guinea reopened on 19 January 2015. UNMEER/Martine Perret

INTERVIEW

If you want to liberate your body, liberate your mind

— Sam Kutesa

Recently the United Nations declared 2015-2024 as the International Decade for the People of African Descent. *Africa Renewal*'s Masimba Tafirenyika sat down with the president of the 69th session of the UN General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, who is also Uganda's foreign minister, to discuss why the global body is so concerned about discrimination against people of African descent. The following are the excerpts:



Sam Kahamba Kutesa, President of the United Nations General Assembly's sixty-ninth session.

Africa Section/Paddy Ilos

Africa Renewal: When we talk of people of African descent, who are we including in this definition?

Sam Kutesa: People of African descent are people who are scattered all over the world, who originally came from Africa or from the same African culture. They were dispersed largely by the slave trade or colonialism. These are people who are Africans but live mainly in the diaspora.

Why did the UN declare a whole decade in their honour?

The reason is that these people, being dispersed worldwide and having come as slaves, remain marginalized and racially discriminated against. The UN felt that in order to fight racism and sensitize the world against racial discrimination and marginalization of people of African descent, we have to have this decade to popularize and find ways of ensuring that discrimination and racism are treated as evil. We believe that this decade should draw attention to these dangers. The UN views all of us as born equal.

The slave trade ended more than a century ago. Why we are still being reminded of such a painful past?

We are reminded of this painful past because its consequences are still with us. The consequences of discrimination and marginalization that resulted from slavery are still rampant in the world. It is important that we work to eliminate them. We already have conventions that talk against them – the 2001 World Conference on Racism, for example, acknowledged these consequences. That is why we are now dedicating a whole decade to remember. And let me tell you that it is important to remember so as to make sure it is not repeated. For example, we remember the Holocaust – it is not because it was not painful, it was very painful, and so was slavery. We must remember slavery to ensure that it doesn't happen again. Of course, it is also important to know that slavery goes on in some parts of the world. If you don't condemn what took place a hundred years ago, you won't prepare yourself to tackle what is happening now. There is still trafficking of people; there is still slavery of black people in countries like Sudan.

There are arguments that the victims of slavery should be compensated just as we have seen compensation for Holocaust victims, which you just spoke about. What is the UN position?

There is no UN position; but there are national positions. Some countries' jurisdictions admit that people should be paid reparations. But the UN has so far not considered a resolution on reparations. However, Article 4 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights talks about the right to an effective remedy by competent national tribunals for acts violating fundamental rights of people. You have to go to national jurisdictions to be able to claim reparations. Even that too depends; I know that there are some jurisdictions that have made the decision to claim compensation very difficult because the claims could be phenomenal. Our best bet may not be reparations but to ensure we end discrimination and marginalization so that it doesn't happen again. That's

the best bet we can look for as a remedy. Reparations will depend on the jurisdictions and legislation within countries.

Even in this day and age - you gave the example of Sudan - there are countries including Niger and Mauritania still practising slavery. What is the UN's role in ending modern-day slavery?
We need to condemn them. We need to isolate them. We need to sanction them because these are against fundamental human rights. We should do that both at the level of the UN and regional organizations to make sure we end slavery because where there is slavery there is marginalization, there is trafficking and there is under-paying of people.

Do you see this happening?
Yes, there are moves to isolate these countries and to name and shame them, to make sure this practice ends.

Studies have shown people of African descent have limited access to services like education and health. What is the best way to address these inequalities?
The most liberating tool in the world is education. If we can ensure they get access to education and skills, then they become employable and can live their lives more freely and also educate their children. We should urge all governments where people of African descent live to give them access to education because it is the biggest solution and cure.

How about a strict enforcement of some of the anti-discrimination laws enacted by national governments?
That is also very important. But what I am saying is yes, even when you are not discriminated against, if you don't have the tools, if you don't have the right skills, if you don't have the education, you remain unemployable and you remain unable to access those rights that would otherwise be available. So the first fight for them is to get access to good education. If you want to liberate your body, you liberate your mind.

Ghana has adopted the "Right of Abode" law which gives people of African descent the right to live and work in Ghana. What's your comment on this?
It should be emulated by other countries. Some of the people in the diaspora have acquired skills that could be useful to African countries. Some have resources to invest. I also think that it's culturally and morally correct to give them an anchor to their cultural heritage. I don't know if you remember the book, Roots, which traced the origins of Africans in the diaspora. The African Union has already passed a resolution that divided Africa into five regions, with the diaspora being the sixth.

One of Martin Luther King Jr.'s most famous quotes is about his dream that one day his children would live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character. Will his dream be ever realized?
First of all, even now – even before the Decade of African Descent was declared – so many things are different from what they were in 1963 when Martin Luther King talked about his dream. Racism is on the decrease. Judging people by their merit is now more visible than ever before. Black people are occupying some of the highest offices in the world, including the presidency of America. That was something that Martin Luther King dreamt about. Of course, there remains segregation, there remains marginalization, and as I say, we need to fight these things but there has been progress since 1963. The very fact that he had this dream in itself set a target for people to say it is possible. And so much has been realized since then. This Decade for the People of African Descent should be used to sensitize and engage in dialogue with other people until this dream is realized in full.

A celebratory rise
from page 14

the new breed of politicians who offer Africa the opportunity for democracy. It is interesting that the three female African leaders assumed office during crises or transitions. Ms. Sirleaf was elected after a 13-year devastating civil war; Ms. Banda, who had been vice president, took over after President Bingu wa Mutharika died in office; and Ms. Samba-Panza was sworn in amid rebellion and sectarian violence in the CAR and Ms. Perry headed the interim government following ceasefire negotiations that ended almost two decades of war.

Not everyone believes women leaders are remarkably different from their male counterparts. Countries in Africa where women are leaders have not always been beacons of good governance, some observers say. But the reasons for this are deep-rooted and beyond the leadership capabilities of such female leaders.

By the numbers

72%
the percentage of Africans who agree that women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men

64%
the highest percentage of seats held by women in parliament in the world, in Rwanda

40%
the percentage of seats held by women in Senegal, Seychelles and South Africa

Obstacles to participation
Satang Nabanech, a women's rights advocate and attorney from The Gambia, lists several social, cultural and economic barriers that inhibit women's ability to make significant changes in politics. Ms. Nabanech cites patriarchal politics, or a belief that men must naturally make decisions and that the place for a woman is the home.

In addition, women often lack skills, education and experience to survive in politics, Ms. Nabanech says, stressing that politics is expensive and many women lack the financial assets to succeed in it. "It is difficult for women to participate in political life when their major concern

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African-Americans resettle in Africa

Ghana is the first African country to open its doors to people of African descent from all over the world – but bureaucracy takes a toll

By **Efami Dovi**

From left to right: Claudette Chamberlain, Jerome Thompson, Florindo Johnson and Ese Adjabeng in front of Ahoto Guesthouse. *Efami Dovi*

In Prampram, a town just an hour's drive east of Ghana's capital Accra, many holiday houses line the shores of the South Atlantic Ocean. One of them belongs to Jerome Thompson. Located only 500 metres from the water, Mr. Thompson's house is resilient to the effects of the salt and wind. The floors, windows and doors are made of hard wood. His self-designed furniture is made from quality Ghanaian timber and hand-carved by local artisans.

"The ocean helps me fall asleep and wakes me up in the morning," says Mr. Thompson, an African-American retiree taking a stroll on the beach where palm trees shade hand-carved canoes. "Where else can I live this close to the ocean? It would cost me millions of dollars!"

Mr. Thompson, a native of Maryland in the United States, retired to Ghana 11 years ago. He first visited the West African country on a tour in 2000. "I fell in love with Ghana and its people," he recalled, during an interview with *Africa Renewal*. "It was good seeing black people, my people, in charge of the country (Ghana)."

That trip took him to many attractions across the country, including the Cape Coast Castle from where centuries ago millions of Africans walked through the infamous "Door of No Return" into slave ships bound for plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean, never to set foot in their homelands again.

But for their descendants like Mr. Thompson's, the sign that hangs on that infamous door today reads: "Door of Return".

"I was so ready to turn my back on the United States," he says, adding: "We did so much for the US, yet they don't want to see us as first-class citizens."

A feeling of belonging

Mr. Thompson is one of the 20 or so African-Americans and other people from the diaspora of African descent who have found a home in this fishing community, attracted by the beaches and the peace and tranquility the town offers away from the hustle and bustle of Accra.

According to 2014 estimates, more than 3,000 African-Americans and people of Caribbean descent live in Ghana, a country of about 26 million people.

Whatever their motives, Ghana, the first sub-Saharan Africa country to shake off colonial rule 58 years ago, has become the destination of choice for diasporans looking for a spiritual home and an ancestral connection in Africa.

While some returnees have gone through the emotional journey of tracing their families through DNA testing, for the majority who just come to visit, or to settle like Mr. Thompson, the feeling of being "home" on the continent is satisfying. "It's good to know that you came from some place and it's not just a figment of someone's imagination," he says.

Claudette Chamberlain shares Mr. Thompson's feelings of belonging. She was born in Jamaica but lived in the US and United Kingdom. Seven years ago, she moved to Ghana and built a five-bed guesthouse at Prampram.

"When I got off the plane, I just had this overwhelming feeling come over me," Claudette says, adding that she realized then that Ghana was the place she wanted to be. She misses her mother and siblings who still live in London but she doesn't miss London. "Ghana is definitely home, I'm going to spend the rest of my days here."

Ms. Chamberlain, a former dentist, says while her native Jamaica is more beautiful, it is not as peaceful as Ghana.

Currently, there are around 200 million people in the Americas identifying themselves as of African descent, according to the United Nations. Millions more live in other parts of the world, outside of the African continent, and in most cases they experience racism and discrimination.

To promote the respect for and protection of their human rights, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2015–2024 as the "The International Decade for the People of African Descent", to be marked annually on 25 March.

Right of Abode

Ghana, from whose shores the majority of 15 million Africans passed into slavery, has invited its descendants in the diaspora to return home. The country has had a

long history, from the days of its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, of encouraging the return of persons of African descent to help with the continent's development.

In 2000, the country passed a law on the 'Right of Abode', which allows a person of African descent to apply and be granted the right to stay in Ghana indefinitely. And recently, the country set up a Diaspora Affairs Bureau under the foreign affairs ministry to provide a sustainable link between the Ghanaian diaspora and various government agencies to achieve development and investment goals.

But it has not been so simple for African-Americans and Caribbeans in Ghana. Only Rita Marley, wife of late reggae icon Bob Marley, has been granted the indefinite stay, and that happened only last year. Those who applied years ago are yet to receive any response from the interior ministry, whose charter states that the process should take only six months.

"It's as if they don't know that such a thing exists," Mr. Thompson says of the personnel who handle the residency applications.

The Ghana Caribbean Association and the African-American Association of Ghana say they are engaging the appropriate government department on the matter.

But what Ms. Chamberlain wants, like many others with residency or work permits that are renewable every year or two, is a more permanent arrangement. She says: "I just feel I am coming home. So why should I be going through all this?"

Beyond laws

More needs to be done to make returning African brothers and sisters feel welcome back on the continent if Africa is to benefit from their return. Samuel Amankwah, the director of research at Ghana's interior ministry, admits that the authorities need to engage more. "Those who left our shores are still our brothers and sisters," he says, adding: "Offering Africans in the diaspora a right to abode in Ghana is a way of engaging for our common interest."

The "Door of No Return" in Ghana where slaves passed through on their way to the Americas.
Africa Section/ Franck Kuwonu

When the late televangelist Myles Munroe visited Ghana in 2012 and paid a courtesy call on President John Mahama, then a vice president, he encouraged people of African descent living in the diaspora to take advantage of Ghana's Right of Abode law and reconnect with the African continent.

Mixed feelings

Despite some initial setbacks, people of African descent continue to migrate to the continent, though not in the expected droves. And like Florindo Johnson, who just retired from Delta Airlines this January, says: it is important to encourage more blacks to come.

Having flown in and out of Ghana for nine years, Ms. Johnson, a Caribbean who lived in Chicago, is retiring in Ghana to operate her six apartments in Prampram that she intends to rent out as holiday accommodations. "I really want black people to come and see for themselves. It is disheartening that a lot of black people don't want to come because of what they've seen in the media, yet white people come."

Millions of girls still out of school

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which result in diverting already scare resources away from mid- and long-term investments in education, proliferation of conflicts (most out-of-school children live in conflict areas) and rapid population growth.

Free and safe for girls

There is a need, therefore, to devise stronger policies to revive progress. UNESCO and UNICEF are recommending that countries focus on "broad investment to strengthen and expand education systems, a sharp focus on improving the quality of education on offer and targeted interventions for the children who are the very hardest to reach."

In a joint report released in early 2015 titled, "Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All—Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children," the two agencies said the priority should be to ensure that even the most vulnerable and disadvantaged girl has access to a school close to home—a school that meets her most basic needs for safety, privacy and cleanliness.

However, there is more to girls' education than getting them to school, says Rebecca Winthrop, the director of the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution, a liberal US think-tank. She suggests shifting the focus on learning for both girls and boys: "One fundamental step for the education community is to refocus energy on girls' and boys' learning and to move beyond the goal of just getting students in school," she says, adding, "We know that if girls are building skills and knowledge, families are more likely to keep them in school." This is because these families can see the benefit of schooling.

A Global Campaign for Education sponsored by the UK charity, Oxfam, previewed these remarks: "Schools should be free and safe for girls. This will ensure that girls have the opportunity to stay and learn in school up to primary completion and progress to secondary and tertiary levels."

In a preface to the campaign's report, Graça Machel, the widow of former South African President Nelson Mandela, wrote: "The time for warm words is over. The time for action is now. Women and girls deserve and demand their rights."

Refugees turn to Ethiopia for safety and asylum

Country now hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa

By **Sulaiman Momodu**

As a 17-year-old boy, James Gaw Tot fled war in South Sudan to the safety of Ethiopia. Little did he know he would call this country his home for the next 23 years.

Today, still a refugee, Tot lives in a camp with his refugee wife and their seven children. He longs for home.

"I want to return home, but how can I?" he asks, gazing out at the Pugnido Refugee Camp in western Ethiopia. "There is still insecurity in my country. Before this, the war with the Arabs was about the struggle for independence. South Sudan is now independent but the fighting continues." In the camp, Tot works as a social worker, sensitizing fellow refugees on HIV prevention.

Tot is among the more than 665,000 refugees currently living in Ethiopia, making it the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, passing Kenya in July 2014. Most of the refugees come from Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.

In mid-December 2013, thousands of South Sudanese were uprooted from their country when President Salva Kiir accused his ousted deputy, Riek Machar, of planning a coup. The fighting in the world's youngest nation soon took a tribal dimension between the Dinka ethnic group of President Kiir and Mr. Machar's Nuer ethnic group, triggering a cycle of retaliatory massacres across the country.

"My parents and my wife's parents were fleeing together. They were killed," said 27-year-old Biel Jock. He fled from Nyirol in South Sudan's Jonglei State with five nephews aged between nine and 14 years. They became his dependents after their parents were either killed in South Sudan's conflict or died from natural causes. Mr. Jock and his family crossed into Ethiopia sometime in 2014 almost empty handed after walking 16 days in the jungle feeding on wild fruits and drinking any water they could find along the way.

Newly arrived Somali refugees board a bus to a transit centre in Dollo Ado, located one kilometre from the Ethiopia-Somalia border. UNHCR/J. Ose

UN envoy Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, wife of the ruler ing she found when visiting refugees in Gambella, western fled their homeland since December. UNHCR/R. Julliart

Resolve conflicts to end crises

"We are witnessing a quantum leap in forced displacement in the world," said António Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as figures for 2013 showed a total of 51.2 million refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people. It is the highest level of displacement since the Second World War. The spike has been driven mainly by the war in Syria. Conflicts in the Central African Republic and South Sudan also contributed to the skyrocketing numbers.

According to Mr. Guterres, humanitarian organisations can only mitigate the impact of conflict on ordinary people. "There is no humanitarian solution. The solution is political and the solution is to solve the conflicts that generate these dramatic levels of displacement."

Currently, there are more than three million refugees in Africa, 12.5 million internally displaced people and another 700,000 stateless people, according to UNHCR.

Dire situation in the Horn of Africa

Sharing borders with Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Eritrea which are grappling with conflicts, Ethiopia has been hosting refugees since the 1990s. In 2011, the country had only eight refugee camps with some 90,000 refugees. But as of June

Dubai, appealed for international aid to counter the suffer-Ethiopia, which now hosts 243,995 South Sudanese who have

2014, the number had spiked upwards to 23 camps. South Sudanese make up the largest number of refugees in Ethiopia at 253,030, followed by Somalis (245,326), Eritreans (126,363), Sudanese (35,870) and other nationalities accounting for almost 5,300.

While the Somali civil war has dragged on for over two decades, the ongoing conflict in Sudan between the Sudanese government and Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)–North, continues to force thousands of Sudanese to flee into Ethiopia.

Ato Ayalew Aweke, the deputy director of Ethiopia's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, says there were more than 450,000 South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia before 2011. Most of them were repatriated after the country got its independence.

"In the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is a very peaceful and stable country. We have eight camps for Somali refugees alone. From October to December 2014, we experienced an increase in the number of Eritreans coming to seek refuge in Ethiopia," says Mr. Aweke.

"When you see the figures of refugees, for instance, which went up from 90,000 to over 600,000 in two or three years, the situation clearly demonstrates the severity of the displacement and suffering in the countries around the region," says the UNHCR Deputy Representative in Ethiopia, Bornwell Katande. "Along the way, for the past two decades until now, not a single day has gone by without refugees in Ethiopia. No single day has passed without Ethiopia providing its support to refugees," he says.

Funding gap

Funding to support refugees in Ethiopia remains a challenge with confirmed contributions so far standing at 12%.

In spite of the assistance from donors, the refugees continue to strain local resources such as water, food, as well as educational and health facilities. These facilities invariably require expansion or improvement, the lack of which has the tendency to fuel tension. To ensure that refugees and locals live peacefully together, the UN refugee agency has various projects in host communities.

"We need more international assistance to provide the basic needs for the refugees such as shelter, food, water, sanitation, education and health," says Mr. Aweke.

The refugees are involved in various livelihood activities, including small-scale animal husbandry and other agricultural projects. UNHCR provides them with business grants and training on cooperative development and business management. The agency is also piloting an agricultural project focusing on improving the livelihoods of more than 200,000 Somali refugees in the Dollo Ado area.

In the Jijiga area where there are three camps hosting more than 40,000 Somali refugees, UNHCR engages the refugees and host communities in self-reliance activities under its Development Assistance for Refugees project.

Early this year, for example, a livelihood and food security project was launched in Kule refugee camp in the Gambella region. The project started with training in business and income-generating activities for more than 800 refugees, who went on to develop their own business plans and form business groups. At the launch of the project, the refugees received seed money to start businesses, and will continue to receive more training.

Again, refugees with skills also serve as teachers, nurses, interpreters, or social workers with various organizations within the camps.

New challenges are, however, bound to come along the way. For example, during the South Sudanese refugee emergency last year, as humanitarians were working around the clock to provide assistance, an unprecedented heavy downpour in August 2014 and the overflowing Baro River banks led to the flooding of Leitchuor and Nip Nip refugee camps, two of the four new camps established to host new arrivals.

"It was a very difficult situation. We had an emergency with waves of people crossing over the border, and then the flooding created another emergency," says UNHCR Representative in Ethiopia Valentin Tapsoba. He commended Ethiopia for sharing its meagre resources with the refugees.

In response to the crisis, humanitarian personnel used boats and a UNHCR-hired helicopter to transport personnel, refugees and some logistics. A mass cholera vaccination exercise was also undertaken in the flood-affected camps.

"Our priority right now is to relocate some 50,000 South Sudanese refugees from the two camps that were flooded last year before the next rainy season in a couple of months," says Angele Djohossou, UNHCR's head of the Gambella sub-office, which is in western Ethiopia and hosts more than 250,000 South Sudanese refugees. Refugees from Leitchuor Camp will be relocated to a new site that the local authorities have allocated while those from Nip Nip Camp will be relocated to Pugnido Refugee Camp, which currently hosts about 55,000 South Sudanese refugees. "We will continue to search for new sites for the establishment of camps as new arrivals continue," Ms. Djohossou added.

By the numbers

3,000,000
the number of refugees currently in Africa

665,000
the number of refugees in Ethiopia in 2015

90,000
the number of refugees in Ethiopia in 2011

Africa grapples with a jobless growth

— Aeneas Chuma

Until recently, rising demands for African commodities boosted most of the region's economies. Yet unemployment, especially among the youth, remains high. *Africa Renewal*'s Franck Kuwonu spoke with Aeneas Chuma, the head of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Africa, about the state of employment and other labour challenges facing the region.

Aeneas Chuma, the International Labour Organization regional director for Africa. Abate Damte

Africa Renewal: What would you say are the ILO's major achievements in Africa to date?

Aeneas Chuma: There are several, starting from establishing international labour standards and strengthening partners in implementing them. We have also promoted decent work in response to the poverty, inequality and unemployment that Africa faces. We support good working relations between employers, workers and governments. We have worked hand in hand with the African Union Commission since 1965 to promote decent work which is a major route out of poverty. Decent work—work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men—should be at the core of every development strategy.

How big is the ILO's presence in Africa? Do you run programmes or just give advice?

We do both. We run our activities through eight country offices and four technical teams. Our work involves not only setting policies and standards, but also running specific projects on the ground on employment, social protections and migration issues. After the Arab Spring, we set up programmes in the Maghreb region to promote youth employment. We have social protections programmes in several countries including Algeria and Mozambique, where we work with partners. One of our biggest achievements has been on reducing child labour in farms in Morocco, in cocoa plantations in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana and in tobacco plantations in Malawi.

Based on your interaction with employers, workers and governments, what is the state of labour relations on the continent?

The quality of the relationship varies from country to country. In a country like Algeria, for example, we have a strong labour movement, a strong employers' movement and a fairly strong central government. They negotiate and agree on social compacts to which they all subscribe. We also have a fair amount of tension among the social partners in other countries. What the ILO does is promote social dialogue. We also have governance structures that engage governments on national policy issues to ensure that the fundamental rights of workers are respected in the workplace.

Still, critics allege that some companies, including those from China, despite their huge investments in Africa, do not respect local labour laws.

Well, initially, there were concerns that a lot of the companies do not observe local laws or international labour standards. We have worked with governments, because this is where enforcement begins, with local authorities, with labour inspectors and all concerned parties. We have also been working not just with Chinese companies but all companies to make sure they understand their obligations and the need to respect the rights of workers to unionize and to freedom of association, as well as the importance of collective bargaining. Chinese companies are not averse to that. Ours is a work-in-progress and we continue to work with governments to improve their capacity to undertake labour inspections.

In one of your latest reports, ILO said unemployment remains high in Africa and will continue to remain so in the next few years. How serious is it?

There are several challenges around unemployment in Africa. One is the sheer

number of the unemployed. The others are underemployment and the informal sector. One of the challenges we face is that African economies have grown sustainably over the last decade but this has not generated enough employment opportunities in the formal sectors to absorb the large number of school graduates entering the labour force every year. Africa also has a very young population. It is risky to have such young, well-educated, able-bodied young Africans just being idle. If you look at the conflicts that we witnessed in Liberia, among others, and current ones in the Central African Republic and Somalia, these are being fought by disaffected young people.

Why is it that the youth are the worst affected?

It's quite clear that the economies cannot generate enough jobs to absorb all these young people. What you need are strategies to create formal employment and to encourage entrepreneurship. This means providing the right skills and the right curriculum to equip school graduates. We should create conditions for young people to start companies or self-employment by taking advantage of information technology and the digital economy. While the unemployment rates in Africa are unacceptably high, the challenge is not only to have economic growth but also to create decent jobs. Much of the economic growth in Africa has been jobless growth.

Isn't that paradoxical? Africa is rising and its economies are growing steadily, yet unemployment remains massive?

The primary cause for pervasive unemployment remains that the economic growth of the last decade has not resulted in significant and transformative job creation. But the growth of the labour force itself is also quite significant: the number of young people entering the labour market every year is larger than what the formal sector can absorb. There are two reasons for excess labour: first is improvement in productivity; the second is improvement in technology. Where, for instance, a company needed 50 people, it may now need just five people or a single robot to generate the same amount of output. So there is a major change now in how work is generated and what it's going to be in the future. Other reasons for high unemployment include low levels of education, a young and rapidly growing population and labour force and few opportunities for paid employment. We should expect to see increases in output but not necessarily with more workers. So we need to re-think our policies on creating jobs.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of the working poor and vulnerable employment. Some people think mandatory minimum wages could help address the situation. What is your response?

Minimum wages can be an effective tool to improve incomes in the formal economy and reduce wage inequality. In some countries like South Africa, India and many in Latin America, minimum wage laws specifically address cases of unskilled and low-paid workers, or those in the informal economy. However, real wages appear to have grown by less than 1% in Africa, according to our latest Global Wage Report. About 75% of African countries with available information do not have comprehensive systems of minimum wages. In countries where they have, the level of minimum wages may need revision. So, yes, ILO believes that well-designed employment programmes and compliance with minimum wages can promote job creation, stimulate domestic demand and provide a better income distribution while also reducing poverty.

Child labour is still a concern. Some believe there is a cultural aspect to it. Is that how ILO sees it?

Africa has the largest number of child labourers. About 59 million children between the ages of five and 17 years are involved with hazardous work. More than one in five children is employed against his or her wishes in stone quarries, farms, and mines. Yes, there is a bit of culture to it but poverty remains the major reason behind this issue. Often the children are drafted into employment to augment family incomes. There is also the cultural dimension, which is often misunderstood. The idea is not to stop children from carrying out chores at home like helping to fetch water. When children are prevented from going to school in order to work and bring income to the family, and when they are expected to undertake dangerous forms of work, that is what constitutes child labour.

Construction of a water project on Caledon River in Lesotho. 📷 *World Bank/John Hogg*

What is the ILO doing to address the problem of child labour?

We've done a lot of work with US Department of Labour and also with UNICEF. The strategy is essentially to create employment opportunities for parents and to make sure that children go to school and stay in school. The ILO is supporting African countries to develop national action plans to combat child labour. However, progress is slow. Nearly half of the 54 African countries have yet to begin designing their action plans.

Is Africa the new face of rising wealth and opulence?

Big money and lavish lifestyles mark newly-minted millionaires

By **John Njiraini**

Not many people in Africa, the majority of whom can hardly afford more than one meal a day, know of the existence of the Maldives, an island in the Indian Ocean. Yet, the island nation, a popular holiday destination for the rich and famous, is the hotspot for African holidaymakers taking a breather away from home

One such visitor is Heshan de Silva, a young millionaire from Kenya. "The Maldives is my favourite holiday destination. I go there every year," he says. He is not the only African millionaire who vacations in the Maldives. Today, the number of trendy Africans vacationing on the breathtaking and enormously expensive beaches of the Maldives is on the rise. For years, only globetrotters from Europe and the US flocked there.

Mr. de Silva, the founder of The de Silva Group, a private equity firm, represents the emerging face of a fast-increasing culture of opulence seen in African capitals amidst sprawling poverty. Like some of his compatriots, he feels the disconcerting inequality contrast, a gap that he tries to narrow through social enterprise. Mr. de Silva symbolizes the successful new African, with class, luxury and affluence. Apart from holidaying in Maldives, he drives high-end cars and owns homes in Kenya, South Africa, the US and Sri Lanka.

Evidence that opulence has found a new home in Africa can be seen across the continent. According to New World Wealth, a consultancy based in the UK and South Africa, there are about 165,000 very wealthy individuals in Africa with a combined net wealth holdings of more than $660 billion. This equates to roughly 28% of total individual wealth held on the continent. From 2000 to 2013, Africa's very wealthy individuals increased by more than 150% compared to the worldwide growth rate of 73%. In 2013, South Africa topped the list with 48,800 dollar millionaires, followed by Egypt with 23,000, Nigeria with 15,900 and Kenya with 9,000.

Angolan elite enjoy the import of expensive cars as a boy looks on while waiting to fill his container with fuel. *Alamy/Zute Lightfoot*

The significant rise in the number of dollar millionaires has not been among the usual African economic giants alone.

Millionaires doubled

Surprisingly, Ethiopia, a country that for long has been the face of Africa's afflictions owing to the devastating famine of 1984, is creating more millionaires at a faster pace than other African countries. Ranked among the top ten fastest growing economies in the world, Ethiopia more than doubled its dollar millionaires from 1,300 in 2007 to 2,700 in 2014.

As the number of dollar millionaires in Africa increases, global companies in the luxury and fashion industry are entering the new consumer markets. In the recent past, sports car maker Porsche, French luxury goods conglomerates LVMH and Louis Vuitton, Italian fashion and leather goods brand Gucci and Danish jewelry brand Pandora, among others, have set up shop in several African countries.

For these companies, Africa falls under the category of dynamic markets that are offering exciting opportunities with higher returns on investments than mature markets in Europe and North America.

With a billion-strong young population and an economy expected to double from $2 trillion to $4 trillion before 2025, the continent has emerged as the next frontier for growth and opportunity. "Africa is no longer that continent the world viewed with pity. Today Africa is generating wealth and the world now sees opportunities," notes

Lyal White, the director of the Centre for Dynamic Markets at the Gordon Institute of Business Science at South Africa's University of Pretoria.

This observation is supported by Michael Musau, the Chief Executive of Emerging Africa Capital, a wealth management firm based in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. "Poverty is still deeply rooted in Africa but the continent is changing," he says.

Africa's millionaires are amassing massive wealth from lucrative sectors like telecoms, financial services, retail, manufacturing, imports and exports, agriculture and commodities. At the same time, the continent seems to be losing the income equality battle. In fact, the New World Wealth research shows the gap is widening as the number of millionaires is growing at a faster rate than the middle class.

Inequality in Africa is a malady that is widening at alarming levels and continues to paint the 'Africa Rising' narrative with shades of black. Africa is the second most inequitable region in the world, hosting six out of the 10 most unequal countries worldwide. "Inequality makes us ask the question, 'Is Africa rising or is the world floundering?'" says Mr. White.

The growing number of millionaires seeking avenues to invest their wealth is a testament that a fast-growing elite has high disposable income being spent not only on luxury goods and affluent lifestyles, but also on business investments. "There is a significant increase in the number of [millionaires] in Africa and most are looking for areas to invest," explains Mr. Musau, adding that Africa's millionaires are investing heavily in various sectors through private equities, hedge funds and capital markets.

Despite the public displays of wealth, the presence of 58 million undernourished and stunted African children below the age of five, high levels of child and maternal mortality and limited access to clean water and sanitation, health and education facilities has forced the rich to give back some of their wealth by creating jobs and engaging in philanthropic initiatives.

"It is consciously disturbing to be rich while surrounded by poverty and do nothing," says Mr. de Silva, adding that his company has a social arm that focuses on offering start-up enterprises interest-free loans.

Riches versus philanthropy

On the larger scale, Africa's billionaires have borrowed a cue from some of the world's richest people like Bill Gates and set up foundations through which they channel millions of dollars in philanthropy. Aliko Dangote, the Nigerian founder of Africa's biggest industrial conglomerate, Dangote Group, recently announced he would donate $1.2 billion to the Dangote Foundation to scale up support in education, health and youth empowerment. Patrice Motsepe, a South African mining magnate with a net worth of about $2.5 billion, has committed to give at least half of the funds generated from his family's assets to improve the lives of poor and marginalised South Africans.

Despite the contrasting realities in Africa, the global luxury and fashion industry cannot ignore the continent in its pursuit for profits and growth. According to Bain & Company, the world's leading advisor to the global luxury goods industry, the industry has entered a territory that can well be described as the "new normal" because leading markets in Europe, Russia, Americas, Japan, China and Asia Pacific are floundering and growth can only be guaranteed by new markets.

Market intelligence firm Euromonitor International adds that although Africa is a long way behind both emerging Asia and Latin America in terms of the size of its middle class, the combination of rapidly growing economies and youthful populations augur well for the next ten years and beyond for the luxury industry. It also reckons that recent spate of oil and gas discoveries in some African countries could fuel get-rich-quick opportunities for a new generation of millionaires, which translates into a growing market for the luxury industry. Erratic oil prices, like the recent plunge, however, pose real threats particularly for countries that are highly dependent on a single resource such as Nigeria, Angola and South Sudan.

Africa's luxury market, valued at $4 billion, is still a fraction compared to the $280 billion global value. Nonetheless, the continent will be the second driver of growth over the next decade after the Middle East.

A celebratory rise

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is survival and they have no choice but to spend much of their time trying to fulfil the basic needs of families."

Violence in African politics may also discourage participation. Generally, women feel "a sense of vulnerability to political intimidation and violence," notes the Afrobarometer survey. In Guinea, for instance, 64% of women say they are very concerned about political intimidation.

Worldwide, efforts to enhance women's political participation have shown progress in the past two decades. At the UN Beijing conference on women in 1995, delegates called on governments to have women represent 30% of their governments.

To achieve the Beijing target, some African governments have used different types of quotas to increase women's participation in government. For example, Burkina Faso and Uganda have constitutional provisions reserving a certain number of parliamentary seats for women, Kenya has special seats for women representatives in parliament, while political parties in South Africa and Mozambique have adopted internal rules to ensure a certain percentage of women can vie for office.

Some, however, attack quotas as ineffective. The pros and cons of quotas seem more like a debate over the means to an end. There is less of an argument over the desirability of having more women in politics.

Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, chairperson of the African Union, says that although the gap between men and women on political participation remains wide, "in 46 countries across the world, women account for more than a quarter of all members of parliament. I am also proud to say that 14 of these countries are in Africa". When it comes to women's political participation, Africa could well be on the right track.

Groundbreaking technology by women, for women

By **Bo Li**

There was a time when technology was a male-dominated field. However, with the advancement of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education, ICT infrastructure and availability of capital for start-ups, the past decade has witnessed the rise of a new generation of IT girls and "cyberellas" in Africa.

A growing number of them are reaching the top of the industry as entrepreneurs.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest regional female Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rate in the world, with 27% of its female population engaged in entrepreneurship activities, according to the 2012 Women's Report by the Global Entrepreneurial Monitor (GEM).

This year, Catherine Mahugu of Kenya, Teresa Mbagaya (Kenyan in Zimbabwe), Clarisse Iribagize (Rwanda), Julie Alexander Fourie (South Africa) and Uche Pedro (Nigeria) were listed among the most promising young African entrepreneurs by *Forbes*, a US business magazine. Aged between 26 and 30, all of them are founders of businesses specialized in the most cutting-edge technologies, such as e-commerce, mobile applications and cloud storage.

Soko, which means 'marketplace' in Swahili, is an online platform connecting international shoppers to handcrafted accessories from the developing world. It is one example of tech companies by women for women. Founded by 27-year-old Catherine Mahugu, it enables talented artisans in emerging economies, who are mostly women, to promote and sell craftworks using basic mobile phones. The mobile-to-web technology gives women direct access to the global marketplace, and helps transform them from manufacturers to entrepreneurs.

Teresa Mbagaya, the head of Econet Education, launched several educational programmes with mobile technology in Zimbabwe, including the EcoSchool project. Through the use of tablets and the EcoSchool app (software programme) designed by Ms. Mbagaya's company, Econet, students were given on-the-go and affordable access to world-class educational resources.

The EcoSchool app significantly improved the learning experience of girls who lived off campus and could not stay late in libraries. With light-weight portable devices they were able to study after school and pay as little as $5 per month for the studying materials.

Recent years also saw the emergence of "girls' clubs" for women in science and technology in several African countries. Ethel Cofie, Judith Owigar and other like-minded female tech entrepreneurs created organizations like AkiraChix (Kenya), Tech Needs Girls (Ghana) and Asikana Network (Zambia), where female techies meet up for action-packed workshops, trainings and networking events. These organizations also aim to change perceptions of women and girls pursuing education and careers in STEM subjects, paving the way for more to venture into innovation and technology.

A study by Icteum Consulting, Meraka Institute/CSIR titled "Women in the Information and Communication Technology Sector in South Africa" found that in core IT categories, women were over-represented in technical sales and system analyst positions, while being drastically under-represented in programming, engineering and management. ●

APPOINTMENTS

UNSOM

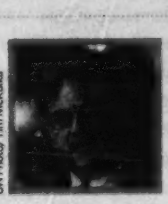
United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed **Raisedon Zenenga** of Zimbabwe as his deputy special representative for the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia. Mr. Zenenga has over 30 years of experience in the UN, government and diplomatic service. He will succeed Fatiha Serour of Algeria.

UNMIL

Major-General Salihu Zaway Uba of Nigeria has been appointed the force commander for the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Maj-Gen. Uba most recently served as the commander of Training and Doctrine Command of the Nigerian Army and the commandant of the Nigerian Army Peacekeeping Centre from 2013 to 2014. He will succeed Maj-Gen. Leonard Ngondi of Kenya.

UNHCR/S.Hopper

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed **George Okoth-Obbo** of Uganda as assistant high commissioner for operations in the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Mr. Okoth-Obbo has served as UNHCR director of the Regional Bureau for Africa since June 2009. He succeeds Janet Lim of Singapore.


UN Photo/Tim McKulka

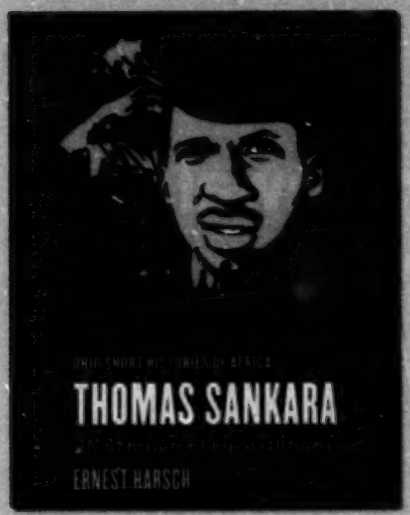
David Gressly of the US has been appointed the deputy special representative of the secretary-general for operations and the rule of law in the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Most recently, Mr. Gressly served as deputy special representative of the secretary-general and resident representative of UNDP in Mali. He succeeds Abdallah Wafy of Niger.

BOOK REVIEW

Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary

by Ernest Harsch

Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, USA, 2014; 164pp; pb $14.95



Following the exit of President Blaise Compaore from power in October 2014, Burkina Faso was led by an interim government made up of military officers, pending elections. Back in 1987, Mr. Compaore had led an uprising that toppled and killed the populist president, Thomas Sankara. After his murder, Sankara was hastily buried in a simple grave without any public ceremony.

Facing pressure from the family and others, the military government recently agreed to permit the exhumation of Mr. Sankara's body to prove that the body is indeed that of Mr. Sankara, a revolutionary leader held in high esteem by the people of Burkina Faso and many others in Africa and beyond.

President Sankara's legendary rule over Burkina Faso from 1983 to 1987 has attained iconic status, similar to that of Argentinian revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara; both leaders' legacies and popularity are visible even today – from coffee mugs to T-shirts. The fascination over Mr. Sankara as a revolutionary leader to both the young and older generations is now explored in a short book: "Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary," written by Ernest Harsch.

In the book, Mr. Harsch, a former managing editor of *Africa Renewal*, explores Mr. Sankara's early childhood and the disillusionment he felt with the economic conditions imposed on the country's poor and the rampant corruption in the West African country. His despair over the country's unfortunate development trajectory led him to speak out against injustice and to spearhead a revolution against the government. He took control within his party, the National Council of the Revolution, and assumed the presidency in 1983.

In one of his early acts, he changed his country's name from the colonial-given Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, meaning "land of the upright people." Indeed, this motto of being ethically upright is just what Mr. Sankara wanted his compatriots to emulate.

During his rule, Mr. Sankara established a culture of self-reliant development and moved the country away from dependency on foreign aid. In doing so, he distanced the nation from its colonial ruler, France. Summarizing this relationship with France, Mr. Sankara stated that he wanted "to develop a relationship of equals, mutually beneficial, without paternalism on one side or an inferiority complex on the other". Mr. Sankara spent a lot of energy fighting illiteracy, hunger and the oppression of women. He was also very critical of men who oppressed women especially in their own families, arguing that "the new kind of woman must not live with the old kind of man".

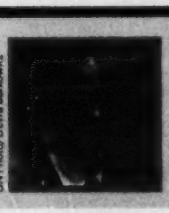
Mr. Sankara exemplified a humble leadership style that included sharing flights with other African heads of state instead of using private jets; and sleeping on mattresses on the floor at Burkina's embassies around the world rather than spending money on hotels. Money, he felt, should not be squandered on unnecessary expenses, but instead put towards better use such as education and other social projects.

"Such lack of ostentation in Burkinabé officials' travel did not diminish the power of their messages. For some observers, it even enhanced their impact," Mr. Harsch writes. "Sankara left a mark beyond his own country. During visits elsewhere in Africa or at international meetings, his speeches struck listeners with their forcefulness and clarity. His frank criticisms of the policies of some of the world's most powerful nations were all the more notable coming from a representative of a small, poor landlocked state that few had previously heard of."

The 163-page biography has nine chapters that include interviews with the late revolutionary leader. It is a fascinating read about a leader who not only led a revolution to free his people from French colonization, but also lived a simple and humble life, uncorrupted by the power of the office he held.

Mr. Harsch's book is part of the Ohio Short Histories of Africa series of "informative and concise guides, lively biographies, and succinct introductions to important topics in African history perfectly suited for the classroom."

— *Pavithra Rao*



UN Photo/Danra Berkowitz

Moustapha Soumaré of Mali has been appointed the deputy special representative (political) for the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). In his most current role, he served as the deputy special representative of the secretary-general for MONUSCO as well as the UN resident coordinator, humanitarian coordinator and resident representative of UNDP. He succeeds Raisedon Zenenga of Zimbabwe.

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